

BOOK ONE IN THE SAGA OF JAY NO-NAME

CALL TO BATTLE



DOUG MURRAY

RAGE

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Life's tough enough for Jay Caldwell. He's trapped at military school, estranged from his stepfather, and brutalized by his sadistic headmaster. Things only get worse when he discovers he's a werewolf... that he's the subject of secret experiments by a ruthless technomantic mage... and that he and all his kind are pawns in a deadly scheme concocted by the werewolves' greatest enemies.

Call to Battle is a novel based on White Wolf's popular collectible card game **RAGE** and set in the World of Darkness.

RAGE



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A RAGE™ NOVEL

DOUG MURRAY

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Because of the mature themes presented within, reader discretion is advised.





SCHOOL DAYS

"...Concentrate on..."

"...Is the key..."

"...No! Not like that!"

Jay snapped upright, instantly awake, his eyes open wide. *There they are again!* He pulled himself out of bed, taking care not to wake his roommate. *Every night this week!* Jay padded over to the window, bare feet noiseless on the wooden floor, his eyes quickly adjusting to the bright glow of the gibbous moon that hung low on the horizon. *And it sounds like it's coming from right outside!* He edged the shade aside an inch or so, keeping his body tight against the wall so he wouldn't be seen by anyone outside.

He needn't have bothered. The entire

quadrangle, the open area between buildings that served as the school's parade ground, was spread out before his hidden eyes—and it was clearly empty. Not a soul in sight.

Jay lifted the shade all the way—there was clearly no need for stealth. Moonlight flooded the room. *Damn! Am I hearing things?!* He stuck his head out the open window, craned his neck to look left—nothing, only the blank face of the other dormitory.

I did hear something! Jay reddened as embarrassment and anger flared through him. *I'm sure of it!* He turned to his right, eyes searching frantically. *The Field House! Maybe...*

There was a flash of light, a muffled click as a door closed. Yes! Jay nodded in satisfaction. *I was right!* He turned away from the window. *I'll have to get my shoes,* he thought, padding back toward his bed. *Sneak into the gym, see what the hell is going...*

He bumped into a rock-hard figure blocking his way.

"Are you crazy!" Jay's roommate, Art Heidel, stood in the middle of the room, hands on hips, eyes fixed on Jay. Like Jay, Heidel had not yet turned eighteen. Unlike him, he was very large—and more than six feet tall and massing some two hundred pounds—not an ounce of it fat. At most high schools, he'd have been a prized running-back, adored by his classmates and heavily recruited by all the big colleges in the area.

At Marietta Military, he was just another student—except to Jay. To the smaller boy, he was something very important: a best friend.

One whose great size was matched only by his deep loyalty. "You're gonna get us both in trouble!"

"Please, Art." Jay tried to move past his friend. "Get out of my way." He looked pleadingly into his roommate's face. "I'm sure I heard voices—and there's *definitely* someone messin' around in the Field House."

Heidel shrugged. "So? Are you on guard duty?"

Jay looked up at his friend. "No, but..."

"But nothing!" Heidel's expression was grim. "You know the Colonel started his *special* classes this week. What if *that's* what you're hearing?"

"Then I'll come right back in!"

Heidel shook his head. "You'll get caught. Those guys are sharp!"

"So I get caught." Jay grinned crookedly. "So what?"

Art sat down on the bed, but never broke eye-contact with Jay. "Don't try to tell me you don't care! I know you better than that!"

Jay allowed himself to drop down next to the other boy. "I guess you're right," he said, shoulders slumping. "It's just that..."

"You keep hearing things."

Jay nodded at his friend. "Almost every night."

Art glanced toward the window, eyes sharp. "Ever see anything?"

Jay shook his head. "Not really."

"And you haven't told anyone else about it, have you?"

Jay looked at the floor, mouth fixed. "I don't want them to think I'm..." He looked up, caught Heidel's eye, shrugged, "you know."

Art nodded. "Yeah, I know." He put his hand on Jay's shoulder. "You don't want them to think you're crazy."

"Like my mother."

Heidel's hand tightened. "Hey man, you don't know that...."

The lights suddenly came on in the room, temporarily blinding both boys.

"So." The voice was low and soft, with just the hint of a Southern accent. "Up after curfew, are we?"

Jay whirled toward the door. "Colonel Sweet!"

"Indeed." The smartly uniformed man filled the whole doorway, his six feet seven inches dwarfing both Heidel and Jay. "What *are* you two up to?"

"Well, sir..."

"Stand at attention when you address me!"

Jay and Art sprang to their feet.

"Better." The Colonel took a step forward. There was a sudden flash as his right hand caught and

reflected the room's lights. "Now..." the shiny hand made a slight clicking sound as it rose to point at Art's rigidly braced form. "...Mr. Heidel." The Colonel's smile became predatory as he leaned forward to stare into the taller boy's face. "You will tell me what happened."

"It was *my* fault, sir." Art took a deep breath. "I had a bad dream and Jay..." He nodded toward his roommate, "...Cadet Caldwell, that is, was helping me snap out of it."

"That's not true!" Jay started to turn toward his friend but was frozen by Colonel Sweet's look.

"You're at attention, boy!" The Colonel's silver-tipped right arm shot out, clawlike fingers locking into the front of Jay's T-shirt. "Don't you go messin' with me, now!"

Jay found himself staring at the Colonel's artificial hand, mere inches from his face. It was like nothing he'd ever seen before. There were no wheels, no gears—nothing mechanical at all. Just shiny metallic scales, thousands of them, each one fitting tightly under the one above it. *It looks alive!* he thought, then realized that he was ogling. He shut his mouth and pulled his eyes away, forcing them back to the Colonel's no-longer-smiling face. "Sir, permission to speak, sir."

"Denied." The Colonel released Jay's shirt, careful to keep the boy upright with his fleshy hand

as he did so. "And don't you go rilin' me again!" The big man turned back to Heidel, his face hard. "So, Mr. Heidel, we're havin' bad dreams, are we?"

"Sir," Heidel remained at stiff attention, spitting the words out as if they tasted bad, "yes, sir!"

"And Mr. Caldwell here was just helpin' you out." The Colonel's grin was back.

"Sir," Heidel's face could have been stone, "that's correct, sir."

"Well then, boy." The Colonel bent down ever so slightly—just enough to allow him to stare directly into Heidel's eyes. "You'd better talk to the doctor about those dreams." He turned toward the door. "And just to see that they don't bother you for a while..." He stopped by the light switch, metallic hand dropping over it. "You'll be put on the guard roster for the next week or so." He ran his hand down the wall, the tips of his metal fingers gouging a trench through the paint and plaster.

"Oh." He grinned at the damage. "Sorry about that—don't know my own strength sometimes." The lights went out. "You two get some sleep now."

The two boys relaxed, staring at the door that closed behind the Colonel.

"You shouldn't have done that!"

Heidel shrugged. "Why not? I can handle a couple of hours of guard duty."

"But it was my fault!"

Heidel laid back down on his bed. "So? Next

time, when it is my fault, you take the punishment." He looked over at Jay. "Helping each other out—that's what friends are for, isn't it?"

"I guess so."

"Now c'mon." Heidel slammed a hand into the pillow, causing it to fluff on both ends. "Get into bed before he comes back."

Jay lay back on his own bed. "Okay. But I owe you one."



Marietta Military Academy was a relatively young school. Founded in the acquisitive eighties, it sprawled across 300 acres of grass and red clay just a few miles north and west of Atlanta.

The school's large campus was a function of land availability at the time of its construction—and *this* land, bought at auction from the federal government, had been cheap.

The school grounds had originally been a missile and radar site, consisting of nothing more than a few vans filled with electronics and some prefabricated Quonset huts for the troops to live in. The only permanent structure had been the big brick headquarters building, constructed by the WPA during the Roosevelt administration.

It was an imposing building, perfect for school offices, and, like the rest of the school, it had cost

next to nothing. Other necessary structures had been designed to conform to its austere style, but they were cheaply made—not meant to last.

Also brick on the outside, these newer buildings had wooden, rather than steel skeletons, and the walls inside were constructed of fiberboard rather than plaster. And like the older building, there lacked certain basic amenities: air conditioning, cable TV, fiber-optic communications...

All of which made them perfect dormitories for the very special young men and women who composed the student body.

Unlike other southern military schools, Marietta Mil was *not* designed to teach young men and women the lessons of the battlefield. Instead, it was built to house the children of yuppies and the *nouveau riche*, promising discipline for spoiled offspring—and delivering nine months a year of blessed peace and quiet to equally spoiled parents.

It was an immediate success.

But money wasn't the only thing Marietta's headmaster, Doctor Robert Caldwell, was interested in. Once he had assured himself that the school was a success in its primary function, he began work on his more ambitious, and, to him, far more important secondary venture. Within a year, he was able to announce (with appropriate media fanfare), that Marietta Military would begin supplying a large number of annual scholarships for

certain 'challenged' youngsters—those exhibiting a variety of odd learning and social disorders.

The move was applauded, as such things always are, and, within a few months, Marietta Military acquired a substantial group of young men and women whose outlook on reality was *different*. Teenagers who were plagued by bad dreams, voices in the night, visions...

Teenagers like Dr. Caldwell's adopted son, Jay.



"Well, Jay," Dr. Caldwell looked at a slowly unscrolling roll of paper. "Everything looks fine here."

Jay lay shivering on a metal table, tiny wires and sensors taped all over his body. *It's always so uncomfortable down here.* His eyes raced over the stainless steel fixtures, the bright fluorescents overhead. *Everything feels... wrong!* Sweat covered his body. *I don't understand why....*

"Just lie still for a few more minutes." The older man touched buttons and switches, adjusting his diagnostic equipment, eyes brightening as several new panels lit up. "I promise this will be the last test." He turned his eyes away from his controls, sparing an appraising glance for the young body on his examining table. "By the way," he said as he turned back to the controls, his hand reaching

toward a recorder, "Colonel Sweet tells me that you've been having some unusual dreams." He made a quick notation in his book. "Is that true?"

Should I tell him? Jay heard the hum of machinery, smelled ozone rising from underneath him. *Do I trust him enough?*

"Well?" The doctor put the pen down, adjusted a tiny vernier. "Is it?"

"N..." Jay swallowed hard. "No, sir. No dreams at all."

The doctor looked at the monitors in front of him, smiled at the results. "Really?" He picked up the pen again, made another note as paper spooled out of a printer. "That's very interesting." He glanced at the central monitor of the group in front of him one last time, then reached out and flicked a switch. The paper stopped spooling, the ozone smell began to disperse. "That should be enough."

Jay sat up, pulling at the wires that held him down. "Is there anything wrong with me?" Dr. Caldwell stepped to his son's side, hands reaching to disconnect the sensors and other devices. "Nothing serious." He opened a drawer, and began to put away the more delicate equipment. "Although I am concerned about your lack of dreams."

Jay turned toward his father. "Why?"

"Dreams are necessary." The doctor sat next to

his son, looked into his eyes. "Everybody dreams. They're the way our subconscious mind helps us confront our fears." He stroked his beard.

"I don't." Jay's look was innocent, but there was a hardness to his eyes.

"And that's what worries me." The doctor came to his feet, shaking his head as he walked to a cabinet at the rear of the room. "It may be a sign of some deep-seated psychological problem."

"You think I'm crazy?" Jay winced at the thought. "Is that it?"

"No, no! Nothing like that." The older man reached into the cabinet, picked through a number of tiny bottles, and grabbed one, nodding as he read the label. "It's probably nothing at all." He turned back toward Jay, noted the look of fear on the boy's face. "But it's always best to be sure." The doctor walked across the lab and picked up Jay's shirt. "I'll want to see you again in a week or so." He handed the shirt to Jay, watched as the boy pulled it on. "In the meantime, I'd like you to take these—two a day, right before you go to bed." He put the pills down on the examining table.

Jay eyed the bottle. "What are they for?"

"Just a little sleep aid." The older man started folding up his charts. "Try them for a week—then, when we talk again, we can decide whether you'll need to continue using them." He turned to Jay,

pushing the papers into a thick file. "Okay?"

Jay nodded and slipped the bottle into his pocket. "Sure."

Dr. Caldwell put his arm over his son's shoulders and led him toward the door. "Right then, it's time you got out of here and got to class. I'll speak to you later."

Jay stepped toward the door, hesitated. "Sir, was my mother..." He looked down at the floor. "Was she..."

"Was she what?" Dr. Caldwell stood in the doorway, still holding the door open.

Jay turned, looked into the older man's eyes. "Was she insane?"

"Who told you that?!"

Jay's gaze faltered. "Nobody, it's just that..."

Dr. Caldwell put his hand on his son's arm. "Jay, I give you my word, your mother was not insane." He looked into the boy's eyes. "In fact, in some ways, she was the sanest person I've ever known."

Jay stared at him. "You're not lying to me, are you?"

The older man shook his head. "No. Of course not."

Jay nodded. "Okay." He headed out the door. "I'll see you later."

"Yes." Caldwell let the door shut, eyes hardening. *And meanwhile, I'll have to find out who's been talking to you about your mother!*

D

That night, Jay stared at the new bottle of pills, wondering if he should indeed take them. *Do I really want to drug myself?* His eyes drifted toward the big frosted window. There were muted sounds of activity coming from the quadrangle beyond. *Now? With everything that's going on out there?*

"Hey!" Heidel stepped into the bathroom, eyes fixed on the bottle of pills in Jay's hands. "I didn't know you had bronchitis!"

"I don't."

The boy put his toothbrush down next to Jay. "You must. I have pills just like that—and they're for bronchitis!"

"My fath... Dr. Caldwell gave these to me. Said they'd help me sleep."

Heidel shook his head. "That can't be! Wait a minute!" He dug into his ditty bag. "Let's check this out." He pulled out an identical bottle of pills. "These sure look the same."

"Let's check the label and stamp."

Heidel and Jay each shook a pill into their hand and held them up side-by-side for comparison.

"They're the same color."

"Same size too."

Jay held his closer. "There's nothing written on it." He turned to look at Heidel. "I thought they had to have a name and dosage."

Heidel shrugged. "Maybe not."

"Well, at least it helps me make up my mind." Jay put the pill back into the bottle. "I'm not going to take any of these."

"Why not?" Heidel popped his own into his mouth, followed it with a quick palmful of water from the sink. "They haven't hurt me!"

Jay shook his head. "I don't like to take something if I don't know what it is."

"Come on!" Heidel snickered. "If the name was in big neon letters you still wouldn't know anything about it!"

"Yeah, but..."

Heidel picked up a second pill, popped it into his mouth and swallowed. "I've been taking these for over a month, and they haven't done a thing to me."

"Are you sure?" Jay stared at his friend as if expecting him to fall over at any moment.

"I'm sure." Heidel looked at Jay. "Besides, do you really think your own father..."

"He's *not* my father!" Jay brought himself up to his full height, his face flushing.

"He adopted you, didn't he?"

"He *says* he did." Jay's eyes became unfocused. "But I don't remember it. I don't remember anything from before I got here."

"I thought he was working on your memory."

Heidel stared at his friend, his forehead furrowed. "It's been over a year, hasn't it?"

"Closer to two," Jay nodded and pointed to the bottle of pills. "That's why I can't trust everything he says."

"At least he *acts* like a father!" Heidel's face darkened. "Not like mine! Hell, I can't remember when *he* took the time to really talk to me..."

"C'mon, Art. Don't get all worked up." Jay put a comforting arm across Heidel's shoulders. "You remember what happened last time...."

"Don't tell me what to do!" Heidel shrugged Jay's arm off. "Never tell me what to do! That's what *he* was always doing! Telling me who to talk to, what to say..."

Jay stepped away from his friend and began stuffing things back into his ditty bag. "I'm sorry..."

"Don't be." Heidel turned, forced a smile and gave Jay a friendly punch on the arm. "It's not your fault." He squeezed toothpaste onto his brush and bent over the sink. "Now take your pill—you're gonna need the sleep." White froth dribbled from his mouth as he scrubbed away. "The big meet's tomorrow, isn't it?"

Jay nodded. "Yeah, there's a meet." He continued to stare at the pill, still unsure. "I just don't know if I need the sleep that badly." He walked out of the bathroom, gripping the pill tightly in his hand.

D

Sports were an important part of the curriculum at Marietta Mil. Dr. Caldwell had declared himself a firm believer in the concept of 'a sound mind in a sound body'—and made physical activity a part of his special educational curriculum. Students not only *had* to excel at some sport to graduate, they were forced to participate merely to gain time off for the holidays!

Furthermore, in a move designed to prevent weaker students from hiding behind the talents of more adept classmates, team sports were discouraged. Marietta Mil students had to succeed on their own!

So, while football reigned supreme in the rest of the Southeast, track and field was king at Marietta Military.

D

"Reveille! Everybody up!" An iron hand slammed against the door, shaking the walls. "Rise and shine! Formation in fifteen minutes!"

Jay groaned as he rolled over, eyes slitted against the light streaming in the window.

"Pills help you sleep?" Art Heidel searched Jay's face as he reached for a fresh pair of fatigues.

Jay nodded. "Yeah—at least I didn't dream last night."

Heidel smiled. "Good. That means you'll be ready for the meet!"

Jay levered himself upright, grabbing for his own clothes. "Oh God! That is today, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Keep in mind that the whole junior class is counting on you."

"Thanks!" Jay made a face. "It's not as if you want to put any pressure on me or anything."

Heidel laughed. "Hey! *You're* the one who boasted about how you could beat any of the seniors."

"I can." Jay pulled on his boots and nodded. "I'm the best runner here."

Heidel headed for the door, closing the last few buttons on his shirt as he went. "I hope you're right—and you'd better run now! Formation's in five minutes!"

"I'll be there."



Jay groaned as he stumbled out of the dormitory, shielding his eyes from the blinding sun. "Damn, that's bright!"

"Mr. Caldwell!"

Jay forced himself into a stiff posture of attention

as Colonel Sweet appeared out of nowhere, striding toward him, eyes glowing, with a notebook in hand.

As always, the big man looked like a recruiting advertisement, his uniform carefully tailored to his huge form and perfectly pressed, the creases standing out like knife-blades in the morning sun.

"Profanity in the quadrangle!" Sweet shook his head. "That won't do." He pulled out a silver pen, jotted a note. "And that on top of lyin' to me the other night." The Colonel studied the page in front of him, metallic fingernails tapping gently. "Lettin' poor Mr. Heidel take the blame for your bad dreams."

"I tried..."

"You're at attention, mister!" Sweet's gray eyes drilled into him. "No talkin' without permission!"

Jay shut his mouth, forced his eyes to the front, fighting to keep them from tearing at the glare of the sun.

"*I should* bar your from extracurricular activities." Colonel Sweet grinned, his even white teeth gleaming in the dawn light. "Of course, that would keep you out of today's intramural meet." The big man glanced up at the brightening sky. "And that *might* be misinterpreted..."

Bastard! Jay held himself ready, eyes front, careful to avoid even the slightest twitch as he fought down his anger. Everyone in the Cadet Corps knew

the Colonel favored the seniors. There were a number of rumors circulating to explain why—some of them quite obscene.

“...In itself, this transgression doesn’t call for too serious a penalty.” Colonel Sweet’s smile brightened as he looked down at Jay’s expression. “But there might be other things...” The big man moved behind Jay, disappearing from the cadet’s vision. “Let’s take a look at that uniform...”

Jay stiffened, feeling the anger welling up inside him, but forcing it back. He knew his uniform was perfect. He’d had more than enough practice to be sure of that. *You won’t get me that way!*

Sweet reappeared in Jay’s vision, his smile predatory now. “Well, you do seem to be properly attired, Cadet Caldwell—at least, at the moment.” The Colonel bent down, holding his face inches from Jay’s. *Are his teeth pointed?* Jay started to lean forward for a better look, then caught himself. “And, it *would* be rather unfair to your classmates to keep you out of today’s meet.” A whiff of minty breath filled Jay’s nostrils. “Wouldn’t it?”

Jay kept still, knowing that he would earn demerits if he spoke without permission.

Sweet nodded, snapping his book shut. “I’ll hold these infractions in abeyance for the moment.” His smile expanded until it seemed to cover his whole face. “That’ll give us all a chance to see if you’re as good a runner as you think you are.” He nodded

toward the formation in the quadrangle. "Join your company."

Jay saluted, did a perfect about-face, and raced for his company. *Got to get there before they're called to attention!*

He made it—just.



Dr. Caldwell stepped up to stand alongside the Colonel just as Jay raced away. "What was all that about?"

Sweet turned, his smile instantly becoming one of total innocence as he faced the school president. "Nothin' important. Just doing my part to maintain his hormone balance." The big officer nodded his head toward the boy, who had just reached his place in formation. "How old is he now, anyway?"

"Physically and mentally, he's just turned seventeen." Caldwell shook his head. "I was forced to increase his medication; I had to give it to him with extra pills—the dose in the milk isn't enough to do the job anymore."

Sweet glanced toward Jay, who was smoothing out the line of his shirt. "He's that close?"

"Past due." Caldwell stroked his beard. "If we weren't using Neophrin 5, there'd be no way to suppress his first... change."

"Interestin'." Sweet watched as the Cadet Corps

was called to attention. "He's the first successful result from your test series, isn't he?"

"Yes." Caldwell motioned the Colonel to join him. "The next one is a few weeks behind—not quite ready."

"Are you going to put him in the special classes?"

"I don't think so." Caldwell shook his head. "He's too independent at the moment." The scientist glanced at the formation. "I don't know if we'd be able to control him."

Sweet held up his silver arm, smiled as he flexed powerful metallic fingers. "I can control him."

"Are you completely sure of that?"

The Colonel closed the shining hand: there was a whirl of perfectly tuned servomotors. "As sure as death."

Caldwell turned toward the door to his offices. "One of these days, we'll have to find out if you're right."

Sweet followed him. "Today might be a good day."

Caldwell stopped, one hand on the doorknob. "What do you mean?"

"We're right at the end of the fall semester." Sweet inclined a shoulder toward the formation. "Most of those kids'll be goin' home for a few weeks." The Colonel shrugged. "This might be a good time to see what we have to deal with." He turned to the doctor. "We *could* arrange to

complicate things for your boy during school today, get him worked up, pissed at the world."

"And then?"

"During the meet, when he's isolated from the others, we push him real hard—rile him up." The Colonel smiled. "Make somethin' happen!"

"And when it does?"

"Well then," the Colonel gestured with his human hand. "At least we'll know he's capable of the change. Then the only question is whether or not we can control him."

"I like it." Caldwell opened the door and stepped into the big office building. "And I know just the thing we can do that will guarantee that things happen." He motioned for the big officer to follow. "Here's what I have in mind...."



The formation broke up in minutes, and Jay found the school day looming before him. *Gotta be careful!* He had always pictured his classes as a series of obstacles, each of which he had to pass safely.

The first, and hardest, was physics.

Science had never been Jay's forte—he'd always lacked the patience to perform the experiments carefully enough for them to come out correctly. To make matters worse, Jay had drawn Mr. Farabough

as his physics instructor. Farabough was known, throughout the student body, for being the longest-winded, most single-minded teacher in the school—a man unable to explain even the simplest point without lapsing into a carefully prepared, mind-numbingly boring lecture.

For Jay and his classmates, that made physics class ninety minutes of pure hell.

Today was clearly going to be no exception. Farabough entered the classroom precisely at the stroke of eight—punctuality was as important to him as exactitude. He immediately launched into another of his carefully planned lectures, droning off fact after fact in a monotone that would put the best of students to sleep.

Jay was *not* the best of students. His confrontation with Colonel Sweet had made an unsettling start to his day, and he soon discovered that his mind still hadn't shaken off the aftereffects of his newly prescribed medication. Time after time he felt himself dozing, his eyes staring blankly at the blackboard, his mind numb...

Then he saw a glint of silver behind the classroom window.

That's Sweet! Jay's eyes sprang open, adrenaline racing into his system. *He's watching me! Trying to catch me doing something wrong!* Jay forced himself to sit upright, picked up his pencil, and started taking notes. *He's not going to succeed!* Anger rose

up in him, hardening his resolve. *Not today—not ever!*

After that, Jay kept a special watch out for the big Colonel. Glints of metal occasionally caught his eye, but every time he turned around, there was nobody there. *He's playing with me!* Jay shook his head. *But why?* As he walked to his next class, he turned the question over in his head. *It can't be the meet—he could pull me out of that any time he wanted to.* His feet automatically guided him to his seat as he pondered. *What's he after?* He caught the glint of silver in the doorway, and whirled to catch a glimpse of his tormentor.

There was nobody there.

Is he trying to get me so worked up I'll lose the race? Jay dropped into the chair, mind racing. *Could it be that important to him?* He slowly nodded his head. *That has to be it.* Jay felt his mouth firm, his eyes harden. *That means I have to win!* He grinned nastily. *If only to piss off the good Colonel!*

The day wore on. By noon, the drug had finished its run through Jay's system, leaving him wide awake and alert. He was beginning to enjoy the cat-and-mouse game with the Colonel, timing things so he was always answering a question or doing a demonstration when the Colonel peeked into one of his classrooms.

Colonel Sweet didn't seem to care. He just kept popping up, his presence announced by a brief flash

of light from his artificial hand. *I wonder where he got that*, Jay thought idly. *I can't believe the things the other cadets say about it, and yet, I've sure never seen anything like it anywhere else....*

In the end, Jay counted himself the winner in the battle of wills. The Colonel hadn't caught him doing anything wrong and Jay, his senses sharpened by the contest, felt completely energized, more than ready for the intramural track meet.

That meet, a contest between the three Cadet classes, had acquired 'tradition' level at Marietta Military. The Colonel loved it because it fostered competition among his students, dividing them so that they would be more easily controlled.

The cadets loved it because the winning teams were granted extra privileges.

Most years, the seniors dominated the events—their extra year of growth and training gave them a significant advantage over the younger cadets—but this year, things were more evenly matched than usual. The juniors had a secret weapon: Jay.

He was to run in the final event, the *Marietta Marathon*, an event Dr. Caldwell himself had established when he founded the school. The scientist said it gave an otherwise normal track meet the *flavor* of an Olympics—and while the race wasn't twenty-six miles long, it was lengthy enough to give the impression of an actual marathon; the average runner took nearly two hours to finish.

Jay saw it as the perfect event. A loner by nature, he enjoyed the solitude, and relished the fact that victory or defeat was in his hands alone—he didn't have to depend on any teammates.

As a sophomore, he'd won the event by a wide margin, shocking the seniors, Colonel Sweet, and, truth be told, himself. Since then, he'd spent a great deal of time training, his solitary runs through the pristine woods of north-central Georgia a source of quiet pleasure—the only time he felt truly alive and at peace with himself.

He felt prepared, in perfect shape for this year's race—and this time, he *expected* to win.

His main rival would be an upperclassman, one of the competitors whom he defeated last year: Larry Gianetto.

The senior, now one of Colonel Sweet's 'special' students, had also done some hard training, determined that a mere junior would not beat him again.

As with the other track events, the Marathon started on the oval track nestled in the vee of open land behind the school's hulking Field House and office building. After one turn on the cinders, the participants left the field and were directed through an open gate onto an old farm road. The path, barely more than a wagon track, meandered through the scrub pine that surrounded the school.

After going completely around the school grounds, the path crossed a swiftly running stream and finally, almost twelve miles away, joined a county service road, where Dr. Caldwell and Colonel Sweet would wait for the victor to emerge.

The race began with every marathon's traditional bunched start. Colonel Sweet himself fired the starter's gun, grinning his widest grin as the cadets leaped into motion.

Jay wasn't among them. He never threw himself into a sprint at the gun. That was a good way to lose your wind—and the race. Jay had learned to pace himself, allowing the other runners to jostle for position while he trotted along just behind them, watching. Waiting for them to tire and fall back.

He clenched his teeth as he saw Gianetto elbow a sophomore, driving the surprised youngster heavily to the ground. *Bastard'll do anything to win!* The other underclassmen yelled at Colonel Sweet to disqualify the senior, but the big man ignored them. *And the Colonel will let him get away with it!* Jay continued to run, carefully holding his pace. The other juniors had done well in earlier events, and Jay knew that if he won, his classmates would win the meet—and all the extra goodies that went along with victory. *I have to win, Jay told himself. The others are depending on me.*

The first quarter-mile, on cinders, was

uncomfortable. *There's something unnatural here*, Jay thought, shivering at the odd feelings coming up through his feet. As soon as he and the other runners hit the old road, Jay felt better. *This is more like it!* He let himself establish a comfortable, economical stride, barely breaking a sweat as the red clay of Georgia swept by underneath him.

Within a mile, Jay had passed all the other runners except Gianetto. The senior was just ahead, his loping style maintaining the distance between them. *No problem*, Jay thought. *I'll wait until we reach the last mile or so, then shoot past him.*

So they raced on, putting more and more distance between themselves and the other runners, until no one else was visible in the woods around them. From time to time, Jay noticed Gianetto glancing back at him, a pointed grin lighting his face. *Smile now, moron!* Jay told himself. *I'll smile later—after I win.*

Some time later, they reached a fallen oak tree, a point that Jay knew was just about a mile and a half from the finish. *Now! Got to do it now!* Jay reached deep inside, calling up the reserves of strength he'd been so carefully hoarding, and doubled his pace, springing quickly forward.

Gianetto heard the change in the footfalls, and, just before Jay reached him, he stopped and turned, a hard grin on his face. "You ain't gonna pass me this time, boy!"

Jay slid to a surprised halt. "Are you crazy?"

Gianetto shook his head. "Nope." He took a step forward, and before Jay realized what was happening, the older boy was springing at him, arms stabbing toward his stomach.

Jay grunted as he was struck. He looked down—and was shocked to see that his shirt was torn, and a thin trickle of blood darkened the fabric. Gianetto swung at Jay again, but this time the younger boy ducked under the blow, pushed his off-balance opponent aside, and sprinted forward.

Jay's heart beat faster as anger filled him. *He must be out of his mind!* For a moment, he considered reporting the incident, then shook his head. *The Colonel would never believe me.* He pushed himself forward, running hard. *Just win the race.*

The stream was just ahead, shining in the late afternoon sun. *Half a mile to go.* Jay risked a glance back. *Nobody!* Gianetto was gone. *Did he give up? Stop running?* Jay shrugged. *Doesn't matter now.*

Without warning, a gray shape shot past him. *What the hell!?* Jay stumbled, almost fell. *What was that?* Then he saw it, turning a few yards ahead, tongue lolling over sharp, white teeth. *A wolf! Here?!* Jay slowed, unwilling to pass the big animal.

The beast was unusually large, its coat almost solid gray, with intelligent brown eyes that stared at Jay with quiet calm. *It acts like it knows me!* Jay slid to a stop twenty feet from the animal. But

almost at once, the wolf turned its back on Jay, lifted a leg, and sent a spray of dark yellow urine his way. Jay backed up, but a couple of spatters still hit him.

The wolf turned to stare at Jay for a moment longer, fangs glinting in the broken sunlight; then, as suddenly as it had appeared, the animal turned and ran away, up the trail toward the end of the race.

Jay waited until the wolf was out of sight, then cautiously followed. The smell of the animal's urine burned in his nostrils, filling his lungs with acrid fumes. Jay shook his head and looked back—there was nobody behind him. *I've still got a race to win.*

He started to run, more carefully now—but quickly falling into a stride that would easily bring him first place honors.



Five minutes later Jay reached the finish line—and found Gianetto waiting for him. Colonel Sweet was at his side, grinning widely.

"You! But..." Jay stared at the senior in shock. "You *can't* be here!"

Gianetto smiled at him. "Why not?"

"You never passed me!"

Gianetto's grin widened, pointy teeth showing. "Are you sure of that?"

"Damn right I'm sure!"

"More profanity, Cadet?" Colonel Sweet's grin mirrored Gianetto's. "I thought you'd learned your lesson about that!"

Jay felt the anger sweeping through him, tightening his chest. "You cheated!"

Colonel Sweet stepped forward, his massive chest blocking out the sun as it filled Jay's vision. "Are you accusin' me of cheatin', Cadet?"

"You?!" Jay became furious. "Yeah!" His face turned red as he glared at the two targets of his anger. "You helped him!" Scarlet floated at the edges of his vision, expanded, coloring his view with a growing red haze. The rage grew. "Helped him cheat me and all the others!"

Jay felt the heat of his fury burn through his chest. His heart raced, faster, then faster still...

Suddenly unbelievable pain tore through him. He dropped to the ground, his chest on fire, his heart rate doubled, trebled, arms and legs beating at the earth as they spasmed in helpless frenzy.

Jay ceased thinking rationally, abandoning himself to the rage and pain.

"Look out!" The shout came from behind.

Jay lay on the ground for a moment longer, letting the pain flow through him, the power of his rage growing in the face of his enemy.

Then, with the fury of the change complete, Jay let the rage take control, and he sprang toward his

foe, knocking Gianetto down and leaping on top of him. Jay's steel-hard arm pinned the older boy as fingernails that had now become iron talons slashed and clawed into helpless flesh. Blood flew from the opened veins of the hapless upperclassman, who tried, with all of his strength, to push the mad attacker away.

"Get him off me!"

It was no use. Jay had locked himself onto his foe, legs braced against the helpless senior's chest while his hands cut and slashed at Gianetto's face. An eye disappeared as Jay's finger-turned-claw drove into the open socket. He felt the scrape of nail on bone just as something stung him in the back.

The world went totally black.

D

"...Control is the key..."

"...Concentrate..."

"...*Not like that!*"

Jay snapped instantly awake. *Where am I?* He stared around, taking in the darkened room, the chest of drawers, the dark figure in the other bed. *Art?* Jay sat up. *I'm back in my room!* He shook his head. *But how...*

"You okay?" Heidel pushed the covers back and sat up on the edge of his bed. He looked worried.

"You've been out for hours."

"What happened?"

Heidel leaned forward. "Don't you remember?"

"Remember..." Jay rubbed at his forehead slowly, letting images form in his mind. "I remember finishing the race..." A grinning face flashed in his mind. "Gianetto was there, waiting for me." Jay stared at his friend, his mouth tight with defeat. "He beat me."

"That's not the way Colonel Sweet tells it." Heidel got up, crossed to Jay's bed, rested a comforting hand on his friend's shoulder. "The Colonel says *you* won the race, then had some kind of fit."

Jay rubbed at his forehead again, harder, trying to force the truth out. Images flowed across the screen of his mind: Gianetto grinning at him; Sweet alongside, laughing. He felt the rage flow through him; the images turned red, hazy...

"Maybe I did have a fit..." In his mind's eye, Jay saw Gianetto's face lose its grin, fill with shock and fear. Jay saw his own hands—*not hands, claws*—tear into that face, rending skin, drawing blood. Driving into Gianetto's eyes...

"I remember..." Jay stared at his fingers. "I remember tearing his eye out."

"What!" Heidel pulled away, turned to stare at his friend.

Jay looked up. "I jumped him, clawed at him." Jay could feel the skin rip, the muscles tear. "I dug my finger into his eye socket, pulled his eye out..."

"No you didn't!"

Jay and Heidel both whirled at the new voice. Dr. Caldwell stood in the doorway, a large leather bag in his hand. "I thought you might wake up about now." He stepped into the room, reached to turn on the light—and noticed the gouge marks on the wall. "How did this happen?"

"Colonel Sweet did it with his artificial hand."

The doctor gestured. "He's always showing off with that toy!" He motioned Heidel away from the bed. "Jay, how are you feeling?"

Jay tensed as his father sat next to him. "All right, I guess."

"Good." Dr. Caldwell pulled an instrument out of his bag, began to look into Jay's eyes. "This is all my fault, you know."

"Your fault!"

The doctor nodded. "I gave you the wrong medication the other day." He stared into his instrument, frowned. "Much too strong a dose." He pulled another device out of his bag. "I should have known better..."

Jay kept himself still as Dr. Caldwell probed at his chest. "How's Gianetto?"

"Why?" He looked up. "Oh. Your hallucination."

"Hallucination?" Jay turned to his father in shock. "What do you mean?!"

"Let's straighten this out right now." Caldwell stared at the boy. "Just what do *you* remember happening out there in the woods?"

"I don't remember all of it." Jay rubbed at his forehead again, saw a maimed, screaming face. "But I *do* remember doing something terrible to Gianetto's eye..."

Caldwell shook his head. "You barely touched the boy." He pulled a hypodermic out of his bag and carefully measured a dosage from a bottle. "It was just a combination of the medication I gave you and the stress of the Marathon." The doctor rubbed at his chin. "I should have realized..."

"I didn't hurt Gianetto?"

Caldwell ran a cotton swab over Jay's arm and eased the needle in. "No, although you might well have imagined you did." He pushed the plunger. "The mix of chemicals and increased adrenaline could well have created a very powerful visual hallucination."

"I *imagined* it?" Jay stared at the doctor. "All of it?"

The doctor pulled the needle out, nodded. "When Colonel Sweet and I arrived, you were already at the finish line, face down on the ground, tearing at the clay with your hands and screaming."

He stood up. "Gianetto arrived just in time to help the Colonel pull you up and get you into the car." He put his hand on Jay's wrist, checking his pulse. "You fought like a fury. I had to give you a heavy sedative just to prevent you from hurting yourself."

Caldwell jotted something down in his notebook. "Gianetto got a couple of bruises in the struggle." He smiled. "So did Colonel Sweet."

"It didn't happen..." Jay still saw Gianetto in his mind, still felt soft flesh tear, liquid stream from his punctured eye. "I didn't do it."

"Get some sleep." Dr. Caldwell said as he started for the door. "The shot I gave you will help." He quickly turned off the light, covering a deep gouge in the wall with his hand, "Then come and see me after class tomorrow. There are some tests I'll need to run to make sure this doesn't happen again."

Just before the drug took effect and forced him into a deep and fretful slumber, Jay realized what upset him the most about the incident on the trail. *I liked it!* The thought lingered. *I was free, alive—whole!*

Darkness claimed him.



"Did he buy it?" The hulking shape of Colonel

Sweet melted out of the shadows as Dr. Caldwell emerged from the dormitory.

"I don't know." The doctor moved toward his office, the Colonel falling into step beside him. "I think so—it was clear that he *wanted* to believe." He turned toward the bigger man. "It would help if we could show Gianetto to him."

The Colonel shook his head. "No it wouldn't."

Dr. Caldwell stared at the other man. "I thought you'd have gotten the boy healed by now."

"He'd have been back to normal in a few hours," Sweet sighed, "if he hadn't screwed up."

The scientist's brow went up. "What do you mean?"

The Colonel gestured with his metallic hand. "Like all the *specials*, Gianetto was trained to *change* when he was attacked."

"Yes," Caldwell nodded. "That's one of the basics of the program."

"Well?" Sweet spread his hands helplessly. "Gianetto *didn't* respond as he should have. He was so sure that he could handle your boy that he remained in human form."

The big man shook his head sadly. "That means his wounds have to heal *normally*." He looked down at the scientist. "Which, in this case, means not at all."

"That's bad."

"Think how Gianetto feels!"

"I don't give a *damn* about Gianetto!" Caldwell glared at Sweet. "If he'd done what he was told to do, none of this would have happened!" The scientist nodded to himself. "In fact, now that I think about it, it might be a good idea to punish the boy—make sure the others never make the same mistake!"

Sweet stopped short, staring at his superior. "But his eye..."

"Not my problem." Caldwell brushed by the stunned and motionless Colonel, heading for his office. "Discipline him. Make the lesson stick." He turned to glare at the big officer. "And don't bother me for a while; I have work to do."

The Colonel watched the scientist move into the big office building. So. His smile hardened. *You don't care about Gianetto. It disappeared. I wonder how you feel about the rest of us.* Sweet turned toward the Field House, flexing his artificial hand. *Perhaps one of these days, I'll take the time to find out!*



"Reveille!" A hand smashed against the door to Jay's room. "Rise and shine!"

Jay struggled to sit up, putting his feet over the edge of his bed. He was surprised to find his pillow

torn. *Better clip my fingernails*, he thought absently as he tried to assess the events of the day before. First, he told himself as he struggled to his feet, groping for a pair of pants, *I've got to find Gianetto, make sure he's okay. Then...*

"Hey!" Jay was startled to find Heidel standing over him. "Wake up! Formation in ten minutes!"

"Right." Jay pulled his pants on and grabbed for a shirt. "Hey Art," Jay said casually, "you got any idea what room Gianetto is in?"

"Nope." Heidel responded as he checked his uniform in the mirror, making sure all the buttons were done up and properly aligned. "Why do you want to know?"

"I need to see him."

"And find out if *he* can see *you*?" Heidel's eyebrows rose.

Jay turned toward his friend, sudden anger flaring up. "That's not funny!"

Heidel checked his watch, stopped by the door. "C'mon, man, do you really think you ripped the dude's eye out?"

Jay's fingers tightened into involuntarily fists as sensation ghosted through them. *Soft, like jelly, full of liquid...* "I don't know," he said, trying to force his hands to open. "But I've got to find out."

"I'll see what I can do." Heidel stepped into the hall "But if you get caught, it's *your* funeral."

Jay did his best to spot Gianetto in the morning formation, but he did not catch even a glimpse of the other boy in the Senior Company. That didn't mean anything, of course. The formation was always chaotic, what with the mass of bodies and the huge confusion before the *attention* was sounded. *I'll catch him later*, Jay told himself. *Before breakfast.*

But it never happened. At the end of the formation, Colonel Sweet announced the final standings in the intramural meets—results that proved that the juniors had, indeed, won. There was a general cheer, the students joining together to razz the upperclassmen.

After the announcement, the formation broke up. Jay tried to make his way toward the seniors but found himself surrounded by his underclassmates, each of them intent on slapping him on the back or shaking his hand. He attempted to break away, but it was impossible. There were too many people trying to get his attention. He finally gave it up and let the river of juniors carry him to the Dining Hall, where, with his newfound friends intent on getting breakfast, Jay was able to slip away.

By the time he returned to the quadrangle, there was no sign of Gianetto—or any other senior.

The rest of the day was more of the same. Try as he might—and he tried very hard—Jay never got so much as a glimpse of Gianetto. Finally, Jay gave up and resigned himself to the fact that he'd just have to wait—eventually, he would find out the truth.

He was munching on dessert when he remembered that Dr. Caldwell had asked to see him. *I forgot all about that! Maybe he knows where Gianetto is!*

Leaving the Dining Hall, Jay sprinted across the inner quadrangle, heading for the headquarters building and Dr. Caldwell's office. He was halfway there when a shape loomed out of the darkness.

"In a hurry, Cadet Caldwell?" There was a flash of silver.

"Colonel Sweet," Jay stumbled to a halt. "I was just..."

"Stand at attention when you talk to me!" The big officer demanded. "Won't you ever learn?"

Jay quickly straightened his posture. "Sir!"

"Better." The Colonel walked around Jay, reached out to tuck the end of his shirt into his pants. Jay shivered at the touch of his artificial hand. "Now, Cadet Caldwell, I understand you've been looking for Cadet Gianetto."

"Yes sir, I have."

"Is there a special reason why you need to see to him?"

Jay squirmed. *What do I tell him?* He looked at the Colonel, noted the cold, knowing grin on his face. *Nothing. I tell him nothing!*

"Sir, I just wanted to apologize for my actions yesterday."

"A praiseworthy attitude." Colonel Sweet stepped closer, inches from Jay's chest. "And one that reflects well on your upbringing' and schoolin'. Unfortunately..." The Colonel adjusted the line of Jay's buttons, his silvery fingers inches from the boy's skin. "It just won't be possible."

"Why not?"

The Colonel smiled. "Why, it seems Cadet Gianetto is no longer with us." He looked down into Jay's eyes. "He was called back home, and since winter recess is so close I saw no reason to keep him here."

"I see." Jay's mind raced. *It wasn't a hallucination!* His fingers tingled. *It was real!* "And I do appreciate your taking the time to inform me, sir."

The Colonel's smile grew wider, filling his face. "Think nothing of it, Cadet." He turned away, gesturing toward the office building. "And by the way, I think your father is looking for you." The big man turned back. "And it wouldn't do to keep the commandant waiting."

"No sir!" Jay saluted briskly, then broke into a run. *Gianetto's gone!* He stopped at the entrance to

the big brick offices. *What's my father going to say about that?*



"Yes, I knew Cadet Gianetto had left." Dr. Caldwell rolled a device with dozens of dials and meters to the side of the examining table Jay was sitting on. "Does that create some kind of problem?"

"Well," Jay shivered in the cold of the examining room. "I *did* want to apologize for my actions."

"He understood." The doctor frowned. "I hope this doesn't mean that you disbelieve what I told you." He looked Jay deep in the eyes. "The whole thing *was* a hallucination. Nothing more," he punctuated his remark by pulling some wires from his machine, "nothing less."

He's lying! Jay was suddenly sure. *But why?*

Dr. Caldwell taped a series of sensors to Jay's chest and back, checking the color-coded leads to make sure that each of them went to the right connector on his machine. "All right now, Jay." He touched a switch. "I want you to lie down and relax now." Another panel lit up. "This is only going to take a few minutes." The doctor smiled. "And then we can discuss our plans for the Christmas holiday."



In the corridor, Colonel Sweet listened to the hum of machinery and shivered. *Filthy stuff!* He padded past the laboratory door, heading outside. The doors opened at a touch of Sweet's silvery hand. *Still*, he thought, working his mechanical fingers. *They do have some uses.*

Outside, the big officer watched the waning moon rise over the Georgia pines. *A good time of the month.* He started across the quadrangle, noting several shadowy figures moving at the edges of his vision. *Clumsy!* His grin widened. *But they'll get better. And when they do....*

The Colonel fought to contain himself; the moon was pulling at him, making his blood rush, humming a feral song through his body. He passed the center of the quadrangle, walking swiftly now, heading for the dim bulk of the Field House.

Come to me, my children. He watched the four-legged forms spring closer, noted in the light of the moon that one of them had an empty eye socket. His grin disappeared. *And I will teach you what you need to know!*



Inside the lab, Jay stiffened as an eerie howl wafted in from outside. "What was that?!"

"Some kind of animal." Dr. Caldwell glanced up from his instruments, shrugged. "Perhaps a wolf." He flicked a toggle. "There have been a few sightings of them in this area recently."

"Wolves!" Jay tried to sit up. "I thought they were extinct in this part of the country."

"Don't move!" Dr. Caldwell came to his son's side, checking all the leads. "If you pull one of these out, we'll have to start all over."

"But the wolves!"

"Who knows where they came from? And as long as they don't bother us," the doctor shrugged, "we'll leave them alone." He reached for one of his switches. "Now, I want you to take a deep breath and hold it!"

Outside, another howl floated across the quadrangle.



"So." Heidel was sitting at his desk reading as Jay came into the room. "What'd he say?"

"Same as last night," Jay shrugged. "Some sort of negative reaction to the new drug he gave me."

"He tell you what he's going to do about it?"

"Yeah." Jay pulled a bottle of pills out of his pocket. "He gave me some *new* medication to try." Jay unscrewed the cap, shook a pill into his hand. "Claims it won't be any trouble at all."

Heidel got up, reached for the pill. "Let me see." The two stared at the unmarked red tablet. "Still looks the same to me."

"Me too." Jay gestured toward the bathroom. "Get one of yours and we'll check it out."

"Gentlemen."

Jay and Heidel turned to face the voice behind them. Colonel Sweet filled the doorway.

"I know it's after hours, but I need to have a word with Mr. Heidel."

Art shrugged and took a step toward the Colonel, eyes wary. "Is there something wrong, sir?"

"Not a thing." The Colonel's smile widened, grew sharper as he drew Heidel toward the far side of the room, as far from Jay as possible.

Jay did his best to look uninterested—but he wasn't fooling anyone. *What does he want?* Jay asked himself, staring at the smile on Sweet's face. *And that smile!* Jay started as he recognized it. *He looks like some salivating animal!*

Turning away from Jay's stare, Colonel Sweet looked into Heidel's eyes. "Son, with Mr. Gianetto gone, it seems there's an openin' in my little group of special students." He put his arm over the tall cadet's shoulders. "And I think you're just the man to fill it!"

"Me?" Heidel rocked back for a moment.

"Indeed." The Colonel nodded seriously. "Your test results have shown great... promise."

"I'm... honored." Heidel's expression showed conflicting emotions, then settled into acceptance. "When do I start? After Christmas leave?"

The Colonel's grin disappeared. "Well, I had hoped you could start a bit sooner than that..."

"No way!" Heidel shook his head violently, pushed the big officer away. "I've been waiting all year for this! My father specifically put aside time so that we..."

"I'm sorry," the Colonel said, sadly shaking his head. "It seems you haven't been notified." The officer reached into his pocket for his notebook. "I'll need to have a word with someone in communications...." He jotted down a note, silvery hand glistening.

"We got a message from your father earlier today. Somethin' about a meetin' in Singapore he's decided to attend..."

"He's going away." Heidel's expression clouded over.

"Yes," the Colonel nodded. "That *was* the gist of it."

"He's leaving me here over the holiday again."

The Colonel's arm again went over the boy's shoulder. "I know it's hard, Mr. Heidel, but you won't be the only one here. Mr. Caldwell is also stayin', as are several of my special students." Sweet's smile reappeared. "Think of it as an opportunity to get to know all of us a little better."

"Yeah." Heidel's shoulders bowed in resigned defeat. "Whatever you say."

"Good." The Colonel stood back. "Your first meeting will be tomorrow night, 2000 hours, in the Field House."

"Eight o'clock in the Field House."

"Casual dress."

Heidel nodded.

The Colonel gave the boy a gentle pat as he turned away. "I know how you feel, Mr. Heidel, but men have to do what they think is right." He turned and headed for the door, looking back just as he reached it. "If you keep that in mind, it'll explain many things." The door eased shut.

"Art." Jay rushed across the room. "I'm so sorry."

"*Bastard.*" Heidel's voice was low, barely a whisper. "He did it to me again."

"C'mon, Art, it won't be that bad."

"Every year he pulls this shit!" Heidel's voice began to rise; a hint of red appeared at his collar. "Every year!"

Jay put his arm around his friend's shoulders, tried to pull him toward his bunk. "Cool down, man. Getting angry won't solve anything."

Heidel twisted away, pushing Jay to one side. "Yeah, that's what he says." He dropped into a singsong, voice high. "*Can't be helped, Arthur. Business comes first, Arthur.*" Heidel turned and drove his fist into the wall. "BASTARD!"

Jay backed away as the red anger spread to Heidel's face. *He's losing it!* He looked around, trying to decide what to do. *Should I call the doctor?* He glanced toward the window. *Get Colonel Sweet back here?* He looked back at Heidel—and gasped in shock.

His friend's skin was moving, muscles writhing under suddenly sprouting fur. Jay watched, stunned, as the boy's mouth contorted, lengthened. Fangs appeared, grew....

What's happening to him?!

Heidel grimaced in pain as his spine elongated, howled as bones cracked and splintered.

Jay backed away. *This can't be real!* His legs hit his bed and he tumbled backward banging his head into the wall with a dull thunk! *It must be another hallucination.* Struggling to regain both his physical and mental balance, Jay looked back toward the form of his friend, praying for a return to normalcy.

But the familiar form of Arthur Heidel was gone. In his place stood an eight-foot tall, slavering creature who, as Jay watched, clawed at the wall, pulling off hunks of plaster, smashing through exposed bits of wood and sheetrock. The marks left by the Colonel disappeared under newer, deeper slashes.

"Art?"

The thing whirled on Jay, claws flexing as drool dripped off its snout and onto the floor.

Jay rolled over the bed and struggled to his feet, carefully keeping the metal bunk between him and the creature.

"Art," he got the word out, licked his lips, tried again. "It's me—Jay."

The thing growled. It drew back one of its hands, cocked its elbow for a blow. There were claws at the end of that hand—long, steely-hard claws.

"Think, Art." Jay pushed the bed as far away from him as it would go, giving him that much more room to maneuver. "You don't want to hurt *me*!"

The creature raked out with its claws, shredding the blanket, sheets, and mattress with one mighty blow. Jay was momentarily blinded as bits of padding and tiny feathers filled the air.. Jay backed away, unable to see.

The creature sprang forward....

Jay saw the door behind it fly open. Three other creatures, just as big, just as powerful, leaped into the room. They grappled with the thing that had been Art, pulling it to the ground, holding it down. One of them, oddly, held a hypodermic syringe. It rammed the needle into Art's arm, pushed the plunger down.

"I don't believe this." Jay found himself pinned against the wall by the ruins of the bed, unable to move, unable even to close his eyes. *It must be a hallucination. Oh God, let it be a hallucination.*

More movement echoed in from the hall; then Colonel Sweet, uniform perfectly pressed, stepped into the room. "This is all a dream, Jay." He took a step forward, reaching to his side. "It's not really happening." One of the creatures dropped another hypodermic into his hand. "Don't let it frighten you." He took a step forward, holding the needle up. "When you wake up, everything will be as it was."

Jay still couldn't move. "Colonel Sweet?" he said, frantically looking around, trying to see beyond the huge form of the officer. "Is that really you?"

"No." The Colonel's smile grew broader, teeth seeming to lengthen. "I'm not really here." The needle came forward. "No one is here." It touched Jay's arm. "You're dreamin'." It bit in. "Hallucinatin'."

It's okay, Jay thought. *It's not real*. Darkness closed in around the edges of his vision. He tried to look around, but there was nothing to see. There were no creatures there, only Colonel Sweet, smiling, empty hypodermic in his artificial hand.

"Go to sleep now, Jay." The room grew darker. "It's all right. Everythin' is all right."

Jay's eyes closed.

"That's right. Sleep now."

Jay dropped forward, into powerful hands. *It's okay*. Darkness swept toward him, rolled over him,

blacked out all sight, all fear. *I'm okay. It's just a dream.*

A dream!



"Damn it, Sweet!" Dr. Caldwell glared at the big man. "Did you have to do this so soon after the Gianetto incident?!"

"I didn't think I had any choice." The Colonel leaned back in his chair. It creaked with the strain. "When I got the message from Heidel's father earlier today, I knew that delivering it might trigger an attack of rage." He glanced at the scientist. "I thought I might be able to recruit him—delay the *change* until we had him in the gym with the rest of the 'special' students." He shrugged. "It just didn't work out."

"How did Jay react?"

"Actually, he handled it pretty well—and he saw everything."

"That's promising." Caldwell stroked his beard. "Still, I wish you had waited...."

"To be perfectly frank, I didn't think the message alone would be enough to trigger Heidel." He smiled. "That boy has more rage built up than I thought!"

"Nearly enough to kill my boy!"

The Colonel shook his head. "Jay was never in

any real danger. I had one of my people outside the door at all times—just as we planned.”

“And what if Jay had changed as well?!”

“You examined him earlier today, did you not?”

“You know I did.”

“I assume you gave him a full dose of the Neophrin—enough to prevent any change.”

“Of course.”

Sweet opened his hands. “Then there was never any possibility of Jay changing, was there?”

Caldwell shook his head slowly, still stroking his beard. “I suppose not; still, there was some danger....”

Sweet shrugged. “You still have your original source material, don’t you?”

Caldwell stood up, faced away from the Colonel. “I don’t want to have to wait that long again!” He turned, eyes angry. “And neither do our employers.”

“Frankly, Doctor, I think you’re overreacting.”

Caldwell’s eyes settled on Sweet, glinting dangerously. “Perhaps I am. But reflect on this.” He returned to his seat. “If *anything* happens to Jay, I will personally see to your punishment.” His eyes fell on the bigger man’s artificial hand. “And if you think I am good at creating things...”

Sweet nodded, smile gone, eyes hard. “I understand. Now, shall we discuss our next move?”

"Reveille!" A hand slapped the door. "Everybody up!"

Jay groaned, rolled over in his bed—and was suddenly completely awake. *Heidel! He changed into some kind of monster! Tried to kill me!* Jay sat bolt upright, heart beating fast, eyes searching the room. *Where is he?*

"C'mon, Jay." Jay whirled to face the voice, throwing himself half out of bed. "Whuff!" Heidel stood there, towel over his shoulder, ditty bag in hand. "What's wrong with you?!"

Jay stood up slowly, staring at his friend in disbelief. "Art?"

Heidel walked past him, pulled a set of fatigues out of the closet. "Yeah?"

Jay stepped carefully to his side, looked closely at his friend's face, touched his hand. "You're... you're all right?"

Heidel kept on dressing, his face turned away. "I'm fine."

Jay backed up. His knees hit the side of the bed and he sat down hard. "Then it *was* all a dream."

Heidel pulled his shirt on, his face set, expressionless.

"What was a dream?" The two boys turned to find Dr. Caldwell standing in the doorway.

"Nothing at all," Jay responded.

A frown crossed the scientist's face. "Don't try to hide things from me, son." He stepped into the room. "Tell me what happened."

Jay stood up, groped for his carefully pressed and hung clothes. "I don't have time now. Morning formation's in..."

"You can miss that formation." Dr. Caldwell sat on the edge of the desk. "Cadet Heidel!"

Heidel turned, face troubled. "Sir?"

"Tell Colonel Sweet that Cadet Caldwell is absent by my authority." He motioned Heidel toward the door. "And tell the Colonel that if he requires an explanation, I will talk to him later."

"Yes sir." Heidel picked up his boots and, without taking time to pull them on, fled the room.

Leaving Jay alone with his father.

"Nice boy."

Jay nodded. "Yes sir."

"Now, Jay." Dr. Caldwell pulled a chair from the two student desks in the corner. "Tell me about this dream of yours." He sat down, pulling a notebook and pen out of his jacket pocket.

"But sir..."

Caldwell shook his head. "No buts. Tell me." He leaned forward. "Now!"



Outside, Heidel turned to look at the closed door of his room. *I should have told him?* he wondered. *He deserved the truth from me.* He shook his head. Or *did he?* Heidel pulled his boots on, leaned over to tie the laces. *If what Colonel Sweet told me is right, Jay and I have nothing in common.* He pulled the laces tight, knotted them. *If what Colonel Sweet told me is right, I have nothing in common with anybody!* He stood up, headed for the door. *Except Colonel Sweet and his pack of 'special' students.*

Heidel scratched his ear. *I don't know if I like that or not!*



"Let me get this straight." Dr. Caldwell sat back in his chair, glanced down at his notebook. "You were in your bunk, getting ready to go to sleep..."

"No," Jay shook his head. "I had just gotten back into the room after seeing you." He rubbed his forehead. "I was still up, still dressed—in fact, Art and I were just... *can't tell him about the pills!* ...we were just talking about our plans for the holiday when Colonel Sweet came in."

"I see." The scientist made a mark in the book. "And Mr. Heidel reacted badly to the Colonel's offer to allow him to join the special group."

"It wasn't that." Jay stood up, began pacing the room. "It was the news from his father. About

leaving him here alone over the holidays again."

Another mark in the book. "All right. And Mr. Heidel was so angered by the disappointment that he..." Dr. Caldwell looked up, catching and holding Jay's gaze. "...turned into some sort of animal?"

Jay's face reddened. "When you say it like that, it does seem sort of hard to believe."

"I'm glad you're able to understand that." Caldwell stood up, moved to the doorway. "After Mr. Heidel changed, you say he clawed the wall..." He pointed to a spot right above the light switch. "Right about here, correct?"

Jay looked over at the point his father was indicating. "Yes sir. Somewhere in that area."

The scientist turned toward the wall, examined it closely, running his hand carefully back and forth across it. "I don't see any marks at all." He turned to Jay. "Do you?"

Jay shook his head, the feeling of embarrassment increasing. "No sir."

"And your bed," Dr. Caldwell stepped to Jay's side. "This monster smashed it to bits, didn't you tell me that?"

Jay nodded again. "Yes sir."

Caldwell sat down, fluffed at the mattress. "Doesn't feel smashed to me."

Jay ran his hand through his hair. "Sir, I *told* you. It had to be a dream."

The scientist nodded. "I know you did, son." He stood up, put an arm on Jay's shoulder. "But before we discussed it, you believed it really happened, didn't you?"

Jay hesitated, looking at the floor. "I guess."

"You still aren't sure, are you?"

Jay looked up, met Dr. Caldwell's eyes. "It was so real!"

The older man squeezed the boy's shoulder. "I know it must have seemed that way—but look around you." He turned Jay around, forced him to face the room. "Do you see any of the damage you've described?"

"No."

He turned Jay again, so that they stood eye to eye. "You saw Mr. Heidel this morning, I understand." Jay nodded. "Did he appear a monster then?" He held Jay's eye as the boy shook his head. "Not a monster—in fact, he was perfectly normal, was he not?"

"I guess so."

Dr. Caldwell's eyes burned into Jay. "You *guess* so." He shook his head. "That's not enough. You must *know* it. *Feel* it!"

Jay nodded. "Yes, sir."

"It wasn't real, Jay." He shook Jay by the shoulders, staring earnestly into his face. "It was another hallucination, a terrible dream, triggered by those wolves you heard last night."

The scientist released Jay, turned to the desk. "Frankly, I'm beginning to believe that the problem is something other than either your body chemistry or the medication. Perhaps we should have you talk with someone qualified to handle such things." He picked up his notebook and placed it in his pocket. "However, just to be safe, I *will* want to run a few more tests, make *sure* that the fault doesn't lie with the drug." He turned toward the door, then paused, and reached out to shut off the lights. "Don't need these now—the sun's up!"

That light switch! Jay almost leaped up as the thought hit him. *It's the one Colonel Sweet...* He forced himself to submerge the sudden notion, concentrated on staying calm, keeping his face still.

"Now," Dr. Caldwell continued, unaware that he had lost Jay's attention. "I want to see you in my office later this morning." He glanced at his watch. "Around ten-hundred hours." He looked back at Jay. "Is that clear?" Jay was still staring at the light switch. "Jay? I asked if that was clear?"

Sweet scratched that wall with his hand. Jay stared at the wall. *We all saw the marks.* Nothing there. *Then Art slashed it, tore it up.* Not a single mark. Jay shook himself internally. *Somebody fixed it up!* He pulled his gaze away from the wall, noted that Dr. Caldwell was looking at him. *What does he want?* He replayed the end of the conversation in his head. *Oh, yeah!*

"Ten o'clock," Jay nodded. "I'll be there." He watched as the older man left the room, then rushed to the light switch, running his hand over the smooth surface of the wall. *Somebody repaired this!* There wasn't a trace of the Colonel's gouge—or Art's more extensive damage. *Fixed it overnight!* Jay looked out the window, watching Dr. Caldwell cross the quadrangle, past the slowly dispersing troop of cadets. *It wasn't a dream. It all happened, just the way I remember it.*

Jay recognized Heidel's form as the boy walked toward the Dining Hall. *Art changed into some kind of monster!*

He turned away, shaking his head as it all rushed back to him. *I did too, after the race.* Sinking down onto his bunk, he rested his head against the wall. *What's happening to us?* He heard the other boys rush by in the hallway. *And why are my father and Colonel Sweet lying about it?*



The remainder of the morning passed slowly. Jay spent much of the time in his father's clinic, plugged into various machines, while Dr. Caldwell ran test after test.

He used the time to think. Something was very wrong at Marietta Mil. *I changed. Art changed.* A new thought came to him: *Gianetto must have*

changed too! Of course! That explains everything! Gianetto was the wolf that passed Jay on the path, marking him with its urine. He wasn't lying when he said he passed me. I just didn't understand....

This school... He looked around himself, raising his head to note all the machines and instruments that cluttered Dr. Caldwell's laboratory. He's using it for a testing ground! Jay shivered as he understood what had to be the truth. He's experimenting on us. Changing us into... The word wouldn't come. Jay fought the thought. No! It's impossible! This is the twentieth century, not the Middle Ages.

But there was no other explanation.

He's making us into werewolves!



Jay was in a funk all afternoon. *What can I do?* He watched the other boys and girls as they streamed around him in the halls of the school. *Are they all werewolves? Even the kids?*

But then another thought struck him. *Or is it me?* A tingle of fear running down his spine, Jay stepped into a rest room and stared at his image in the big mirror over the sinks. He noted the circles under his eyes, the worry lines creasing his face. *Is Caldwell right? Do I need psychiatric help? Am I going crazy?*—he almost flinched as he was struck by another thought—*Like my mother?*

There is only one way to be sure. If I am right, and this isn't some sort of mad hallucination, then Colonel Sweet was part of it—and his 'special' classes were made up of nothing but werewolves!

That would explain a lot of things, Jay realized. Including why the Colonel is so prejudiced toward the seniors.

Of course, it would also mean that Sweet himself was a werewolf. Why not? Jay felt a grin cross his face. If I'm a werewolf, and Art's a werewolf, anybody can be a werewolf!

That settles it, then, Jay nodded to himself. I've got to get a look at one of those 'special' classes... and live to tell about it.

Dinner took forever. Most of the cadets were already gone, on their way home for the holidays. Those who were left were divided into two groups—the ones whose parents were coming in the morning, and those who were going to be stuck at the school over the vacation.

Many of those staying were seniors—most of them Colonel Sweet's 'special' students. They were eating together, as they usually did, hogging a table on the far side of the big room, near the serving area.

Jay noted that Art had joined that bunch—and

that he didn't look happy about it. *Maybe I'm wrong*, he thought, seeing the unhappiness written on Heidel's face. *Maybe Art isn't one of them. But no. That makes no sense. I saw him change. And besides, he has to be part of their cover-up.* That was another thing that puzzled Jay. Why go to all that trouble to keep him from finding out what was happening? *Why am I so important?*

Jay was determined to do whatever it took to find out.

The meal seemed to go on forever. None of the remaining cadets were eager to move to their dormitories. Too many rooms were empty now, and the nights would be long and dark. Jay understood their feelings. *How many of them suspect something is wrong?* he wondered.

Colonel Sweet finally broke things up. He rose from the head table and motioned to Paul Francis. The big senior was Cadet Captain, and, at his commander's signal, he hurried to call the troops to attention.

"Stand at ease!" Colonel Sweet took in the remnants of the Corps from the front of the room. "I know this is an..." His gaze swept across the faces before him. "...uncomfortable time of year to be away from your families." The scattered cadets nodded in agreement. "Now," Sweet said as he rose to his full height, towering over the others in the room, "I won't pretend that I'm your papa." The

wide grin that they all knew so well stole across his face. "And I am *certainly* not your mama!" There was a smattering of laughter as the smile disappeared. "But I *am* your commanding officer." He looked out at the cadets. "There will be no official classes during the break." Someone cheered. "But I don't want you to get fat and lazy!" Someone booed. "For that reason, I have arranged a series of special lectures." He gestured to Captain Francis, who began to pass out fliers. "They're not mandatory, but I think you'll find some of them interesting. And they'll give you something to do."

A murmur spread through the room as the cadets looked over the lecture list. *Not bad*, Jay thought, glancing at the offerings. *They've got some interesting stuff here*. He looked toward the front of the room, picked out the solitary form of Dr. Caldwell watching from the head table. *I wonder why....*

"That's all I have for you." The Colonel motioned to the exits. "All those who still have tests to take or special classes to attend may leave now." Chairs scraped as boys and girls rose. "Just remember, there will be a special dinner laid on for Christmas Eve." The Colonel's smile warmed. "I'd like you all to be here. For now, though..." He looked over the room. "...Dismissed!"

Jay walked slowly back to his dormitory, hoping that he'd meet Heidel along the way. He wanted to talk to the other boy about what was happening, find out if he had somehow completely misinterpreted things.

But Heidel never showed up.

Jay knew what he had to do next. He had to find a way to watch the 'special' group at their training. If what he suspected was true, his questions would be answered. He remembered the Colonel telling Art that tonight's class would begin at 20:00. Jay looked at his watch. He would wait until 20:15, then sneak into the Field House. Things should be happening by then.

The quadrangle was midnight dark by eight o'clock. The normal dorm lights were mostly out now, and the new moon gave no light at all.

Jay couldn't see a thing. *God, it's dark!* he thought, straining his eyes for any sign of light. *I'd better be careful not to fall and break something.* That would be terrible, he suddenly realized. Caught in the infirmary while Dr. Caldwell performed whatever experiments he wanted to.

Why am I so sure he's behind everything? Jay wondered. Is it just because he's my stepfather? Or is it something else?

Jay shook the question off. *No time to think about that now.* He pushed himself forward, stepping carefully away from the protection of the dormitory entrance, making sure to keep one hand in light contact with the brick wall. *That'll keep me going in the right direction.* He turned to the right. *The Field House should be over there—maybe sixty yards.* He began to count steps, releasing his hold on the wall when he reached the corner of the dormitory, continuing on in what he hoped was a straight line.

Just a little farther... Jay suddenly stubbed his toe on something hard. *Damn!* He stumbled forward, flailing his arms in an attempt to regain his balance. *Hit the top of the stairs! If I fall...*

But he didn't. He caught his balance just at the edge of the staircase, his right foot solidly on the first step. *Thank God!* Jay could feel his heart beating faster as blood rushed through his body. He allowed himself a second to catch his breath. *Have to be more careful!* He took the first step down, then the second. There were no lights showing in the Field House. *Am I wrong?* Then he heard the voices....

I'm not wrong.

Jay slipped into the Field House through a side door. He was careful to ease it open and shut. *Don't want to announce my presence.* Sure that the door was secure, Jay eased to one side of the corridor, again allowing one hand to remain in light contact with the wall. Figuring they would be in the gym, Jay started down the hall.

"Remember..." *That sounds like Colonel Sweet's voice!* "Control is the key."

Jay reached the center of the entry hall. There were two ways to go from here. Farther down the hall, he'd come to the locker rooms. A right turn would take him into the gym itself. *Which way should I go?* He stood for a second, indecisive; then he realized that there was light ahead: the door between the gym and the locker room was open! He headed that way.

It was a large locker room, divided into two sections: the bigger half for male students, a smaller one for female. Jay ghosted through the main door and noted all the fatigues and other clothes in the men's section. *Looks like there are eight or ten inside.* He smiled nervously. *All males—imagine that—and Dr. Caldwell went to all that trouble to make us coed!*

The voices were louder here: "No!" That was definitely Colonel Sweet. "You've got to

concentrate!" Jay slipped forward, anxious to hear more. "Try it again!" *Close!* He realized that he'd be less likely to get caught if he went into the women's side, but that would take time—and he had to *see*—had to *know*, right now!

If I can get to the doorway, peek around the edge... Jay slipped forward, ducking to the side of the locker room, circling along the outside wall. *Just a little farther....*

"Now, relax for a moment." Jay wondered whom Sweet was talking to. *He's never that nice to the cadets.* He sidestepped an open locker, noted the name tag slipped into the holder. *Paul Francis.* He nodded slowly. *Figures he'd be one of them.* The door was just ahead now. Jay crept along, trying desperately not to make a sound. *Just a little farther...* He reached the edge of the door, inched his face around...

And saw them.

My God! They're huge! Jay stared at the brightly lit figures moving across the gym floor. *They must be nine, ten feet tall!* His eyes widened, taking in details. They were completely covered with hair. He goggled. *And they have tails!*

And those teeth!

Jay's mind screamed at him to leave, but he stood frozen, peering into the gym. *That must be Colonel Sweet,* he realized, noting a huge creature with a metal hand. As he watched, Sweet gestured with

his silver fingers to one of the other creatures. *Gianetto!* Jay realized, seeing the empty eye socket. *I did rip out his eye!* For an instant, his fingers shivered, tingling with the memory of the feel of jellylike matter. *What are they doing?* As he watched, the one-eyed creature *shifted* shapes, dropping to all fours. *He changed into a wolf!* Jay watched as the Colonel barked orders. "All right now, concentrate..." Gianetto froze in place for a moment. "Now!" Again he shifted—and was eight feet tall, fangs glistening, claws scratching the floor.

Jay backed away. *It's all true!* He looked around, heart beating fast. *They're all werewolves!* He staggered, almost banging into Francis' locker. *And that means I am too!*



Jay stumbled out of the Field House into the clean darkness of the night, his mind spinning from what he had just seen. *Monsters!* He repeated it aloud, too stunned to keep silent. "They're all monsters!"

"Just like you."

Jay whirled at the soft words, heart thudding in terror.

"Don't worry, Jay." A shape, huge and shadowy, loomed beside him. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"Art?"

The shape shrank to human size. "Yeah, it's me."

"How did you know I was here?"

"You made enough noise for the whole quadrangle to hear!" Jay caught a glimpse of smiling teeth. "And our senses are a bit—sensitive." A hand reached out, took Jay by the shoulder. "C'mon, now." He shoved, pushing Jay toward the darkened dormitory. "Go back to our room."

He turned just as the shadow shifted again, became mind-numbingly huge. "I'll meet you there." Still Heidel's voice, but muffled now, different. "Later."

Jay nodded and backed away, almost tripping over the edge of the sidewalk.

"At least *try* to be quiet!" Definitely a different voice. More powerful—angrier. Jay watched as the shadow disappeared into the Field House. He noted that it had to duck its head to get through the door. *I'd better do what he says.* Jay worked his way back to the dormitory, doing his best to be silent.

When he finally reached his room, he turned *all* the lights on.



Art stepped into the long Field House corridor. *It might have been a mistake to talk to Jay,* he thought.

But he is my friend, and the Colonel said that...

"So—Mr. Heidel! Did you have a nice chat?"

Heidel was shocked by the voice. He turned toward the voice, automatically dropping into one of the fighting stances he'd been taught.

"Very nice." Silver glinted in the darkness. "And after only a few sessions."

"Colonel Sweet?"

A huge figure moved into view, appearing from one of the wall niches built to hold a drinking fountain. Still in shadow, the figure stepped out, its bulk seeming to fill the entire width of the corridor. "I watched your little talk with Mr. Caldwell."

Heidel held his stance. "You told me yourself that *he* wasn't the enemy."

The giant nodded. "He isn't."

Heidel relaxed, began to straighten up. "I was just trying to keep him from..."

A silver hand flashed out of the darkness, smashed against the side of Heidel's head. The cadet went crashing into the wall. "That was stupid!" The shadow moved with amazing speed and grabbed Heidel by the throat before he could sink to the floor. "Never drop your guard!" The hand tightened, cutting off his air. "Even among friends!"

Heidel found himself swimming in the air, held above the floor by the incredible strength of

Colonel Sweet. He fought, clawing out with front and rear legs.

Nothing worked.

"Enough of this!" The Colonel threw Heidel to the side as if he were weightless. "Next time, you won't forget—will you?"

Heidel lay on the floor for a moment, letting his body regain breath and strength. Then he snarled, prepared to spring.

"I said next time!" The Colonel's voice was low but powerful. "Right now, you'd lose and there's no reason for us to fight." He helped Heidel to his feet. "I don't have a problem with you talkin' to Caldwell." Sweet's grin caught the light. "In fact, I think there are a few special things you *should* tell him...."



"And that's it, Jay." Art Heidel leaned back against the wall. "The Colonel says he and Caldwell have gathered us here to make sure we're safe. Otherwise, when the first change comes..." Heidel made a face. "Well, you can understand what would happen. We'd be branded as insane, tossed into asylums by authorities more interested in their safety than ours." Heidel looked out the window. "I don't know what I'd do if they locked me up."

"You *are* werewolves, then!" Jay sat as far from his friend as possible, scared, but too nervous to admit it.

"We prefer to call ourselves *Garou*," Heidel said, a timid smile creasing his face. "At least, that's what the Colonel told us." He leaned forward. "There *used* to be a lot of us. In fact, once upon a time, we ruled the world!" His smile became rueful. "Although that was a long, *long* time ago..."

"What happened?" Jay found himself leaning forward, interested despite his fear.

"Our ancestors became vain—sure of their own powers." Heidel's eyes turned inward, searching his own soul as he talked. "They felt superior to humans—with good reason—but when they tried to place themselves above the other shapeshifters...."

Jay's mouth opened. "There are *other* shapeshifters?!"

Heidel nodded. "Lots of them!" He hesitated. "At least, there *used* to be." He turned toward the wall, unconsciously clenching his fists. "The *Garou* fought them, killed most of them off."

Jay shook his head, trying to take it all in.

"But while we *Garou* were fighting and strutting around, the humans grew more numerous, began destroying forests and building cities." He turned back to Jay. "They changed the planet."

"Why would that affect you—" Jay caught himself. "Us?"

"We're creatures of the Wyld; we can't live the way humans do."

Is that why the cinders of the track feel wrong? Jay asked himself.

"The Colonel and your..." Heidel hesitated at the look in Jay's eye. "...foster father founded this place so there'd be a refuge for us." He motioned, the sweep of his arm taking in the entirety of the campus. "A place where we can go through our first change among friends." He smiled. "A place where we can be trained to use our powers to the fullest."

"For what?"

"To take this planet back!" Jay backed away from his vehemence. "Destroy all the cities, reclaim our power!"

"And how are you going to do that?"

"I don't know," Heidel shrugged, a look of embarrassment on his face. "The Colonel hasn't told us all of his plan yet."

"So." Jay got up and began to pace the room. "You're just going to do whatever Colonel Sweet tells you to do."

Heidel shrugged.

"I thought you hated being told what to do."

"This is for a good cause!" Heidel's face shone with his enthusiasm. "I know it—I can feel it!"

"And Colonel Sweet?"

"He's one of us!" The big cadet locked eyes with his friend. "He's an honorable man—a good leader—I'm sure of it!"

Jay's own eyes were questioning now. "And me?"

Heidel avoided his gaze. "You're... different."

Jay touched his friend's arm. "What do you mean?"

"The Colonel says..." Heidel kept his eyes on the floor. "He says there's something you have to see. Something only he can show you." He looked up, met Jay's gaze. "He wants me to bring you to him." Heidel raised his hands in supplication. "Will you come?"



The quadrangle was still black as pitch. Jay followed Heidel, keeping the form of his friend in front of him as they walked toward the Field House. *Can I trust him?* he wondered, remembering the fury his friend had exhibited just a few days before. Jay sighed. *I guess I have to trust him.*

The Field House was close now, a deeper patch of darkness in the night.

"I see you brought him." The voice came from nearby. Jay turned to his right, ready to flee, but the shape that appeared out of the dimness was

human—except for the silvery glint of one arm. “Jay, I’m glad you came.”

“Colonel.” Jay nodded. “Art’s been explaining things to me.”

“Good.” There was a flash of teeth, visible even in the darkness. “There are a lot of things you have to understand.”

“Like what?”

The Colonel put his *real* arm on Jay’s shoulder. “Come with me. I’ll show you.” He started moving to the right, toward the office building, then turned. “Mr. Heidel, thank you.” Art’s shape hesitated for a moment. “That will be all.”

Jay could see his friend’s unease. *He doesn’t want to leave me!* But, finally, the big youngster turned away, his shape disappearing against the blackness of the dormitory.

“Now,” the Colonel said as he resumed walking. “If you’ll come this way.”

Jay felt his own fears well up. After all, this man was a werewolf! *Garou*. The thought came out of nowhere. *Call them Garou*. The fear began to fade. *And remember*, Jay told himself. *You’re just like them*.

It was a reassuring thought. But it wasn’t true.



The room was huge. Jay couldn’t see the other end from the doorway in which he and Colonel

Sweet stood. *How did they build this?* he wondered, looking up at the ceiling, thirty feet above. Then he realized they hadn't, that it must have been here already. He looked around, saw the naked walls, all poured concrete, reinforced with steel rods. *Some sort of military construction...*

"The Army built this." Sweet's words confirmed Jay's guess. "Back when this was an active base." He pulled the boy forward. "There were a couple of Nike-Hercules antiaircraft sites in the area." Sweet indicated bits of cut-off wiring sticking out of the walls. "This was their control center—safe and insulated from the rest of the world." They skirted around a ten-foot-tall cabinet. "Now, it's Dr. Caldwell's laboratory. The place he uses for his... experiments."

Jay found himself standing in an open section of floor. All around him were a series of cabinets, each eight to ten feet tall. Each cabinet had a glass front, and each was filled with some kind of clear liquid. Jay peered at the closest of the devices. He could hear a whirring sound coming from a pump on the side, and it was clear that the liquid inside was moving, constantly recirculating.

"Go on." Colonel Sweet's grin was hard. "Take a close look."

Jay padded over to the big cabinet, still struggling to see through the thick glass. *It's kind of cloudy*, he thought. *I'll have to get right up next to it.* Somehow,

he felt reluctant to do so. *This room*—he hunched his shoulders—*it feels... bad!*

"I know what you're experiencin', Jay." Colonel Sweet's arm touched his shoulder. "But you *have* to see."

Jay took a deep breath, pushed the feeling of unease down as far as it would go, and stepped forward. *Just take one step forward*, he told himself. *Go one step at a time.*

There was a shape in the cabinet. It was too dim to see clearly—just a shape, bulky and dark. *One more step.* It was too big to be human. *One more step.* Jay was nearly to the glass door now. The shape floating in the liquid rotated slightly, toward Jay.

He stopped, frozen in his tracks as he finally saw all of it.

"Yes," Colonel Sweet said from beside him. "It's a shapeshifter." The big officer stepped forward, pointed at the thing in the cabinet. "In this case, it's a Gurahl—a werebear." He gestured to the sides. "Take a look at the others."

Jay staggered around the circle of cabinets, unable to believe the variety of beings he saw. There were werecoyotes, werealligators, weresharks.... Creatures that boggled the mind, and yet were somehow completely familiar, completely natural....

He came to the final cabinet—and stopped

again, a cold hand touching his heart. *There's something different about this one*, he thought. *I can feel it!* Jay took a deep breath, swallowed, took a step forward. The shape in this cabinet was smaller and slighter—more delicate than the others.

"Your feelings are accurate, Jay." Colonel Sweet was suddenly beside him. "There is something special about this one."

Jay could almost see through the glass now. Suppressing the urge to run away, he took another step and found himself looking at...

A woman.

She hung there, nude body slowly turning in the moving stream of liquid. Jay stared at her, his heart beating faster. *She's beautiful!* He squinted, trying to get a better look at her face. *And familiar somehow...*

"Take a good look, Jay." Sweet's smile was reflected in the glass door. "A really close look."

The body turned a bit more, the face coming more directly into view. *I've seen her before*, Jay realized. He put his hand on the front of the cabinet, got as close as he could. "I know that face!"

"You should; it's a lot like yours." Sweet's voice was triumphant now. "And that's not unusual, seein' as she's your mother!"

Jay staggered, shocked by the assurance in the big officer's voice. "That's impossible! My mother is dead!"

"Who told you that?"

Jay started to answer, then realized what he was about to say.

"That's right." The smile on Sweet's face was maddeningly placid and smug. "Caldwell told you, didn't he?"

"But..."

Sweet shook his head. "Before you get into your 'buts', let me show you something else."

The Colonel led the way between two of the cabinets, down a long aisle filled with machinery and sensors, to a door. "Take a look in here."

Jay marched to the door, determined not to show any more weakness. There was no lock. "Go on," the Colonel gestured. "Open it up."

Jay turned the knob.

Lights came on, automatically triggered by body heat. Jay stepped inside, at this point prepared for anything.

And was still shocked.

This room, too, was full of cabinets. Row after row of them, floor to ceiling, as far as the eye could see. In the one closest to the door, Jay found himself looking at something that took his breath away. *No*. His mind tried to hide from the truth. *It can't be! It must be something else!*

But he knew that it wasn't.

"They're fetuses." Sweet was right next to him. "Artificially conceived using DNA from the

shapeshifters out there." The Colonel pointed to one near the front of the room. "That one there is your brother."

Jay stood, mind locked, unwilling to accept what he was seeing.

"Your 'father'," the Colonel lost his smile, "Dr. Caldwell," he gestured around the room, "made these. He's tryin' to create a new kind of Garou—one that can breed with other shapeshifters."

Jay reeled. *This must be a hallucination! A dream!* He tried to concentrate, understand what the Colonel was telling him. *His father...* "Why...?"

"It's what he does," the Colonel said, waving at the tanks all around. "He's what we call a Progenitor mage—sort of a scientific sorcerer."

Jay nodded, ready to accept anything at the moment. "And why am I so important?"

"All the others," the Colonel went on, prowling the room, "died within a few days of their birth." He looked at Jay. "Only you survived." The smile returned. "You're a product of his technology. What the Garou call a *fomor*." He stopped in front of Jay, his face sincere. "Garou can sense that you're different—unnatural." His smile turned wistful. "Like me."

Jay stared at the Colonel's silver arm as understanding flooded through him.

"That's right," The big officer held his artificial arm to the light. "This is the reason I left the

tribes." He smiled wryly. "Even though I lost my arm in honorable battle, they told me it was wrong—*unclean*— to have it replaced."

"You said 'tribes'?"

Sweet nodded. "Yes. The Garou are divided into tribes, each with its own totem, its own rules."

"Which tribe did I come from?"

"I don't know." Sweet shook his head sadly. "Only Caldwell could answer that."

"Wha..." Jay swallowed. "What do I do?"

"There's nothin' you *can* do." Sweet indicated all the containers in the room. "Caldwell is already growin' your replacement in there." The big Colonel grimaced. "He's not happy with the way you're developin'." He turned to face Jay, his eyes serious. "You've got to get out of here, now. Tonight." His hand closed on the boy's arm. "Before Caldwell realizes you know the truth."

"What about Art?" Jay looked wildly around, grasping for straws. "All these others..."

Sweet's smile returned. "I'll take care of them."



ON THE ROAD

I'm lost! Jay stared around the little clearing this most recent path had dead-ended into. *I don't have the vaguest idea where I am.* For three days he had run from Marietta Military and the secrets of the hidden room. Three days of constant movement, constant fear of pursuit. *Caldwell won't let me get away this easily!* Jay told himself—and kept an eye peeled behind him. But there was never anyone there. *Or anyone anywhere!* Just a trail that seemed to go on forever.

For the first two days, Jay had traveled with a plan. He used the sun to guide him south and west—as far away from cities as he could go. He knew that it was the best way to avoid the

possibility of discovery. *Caldwell might report me as a runaway*, he told himself. *Better to stay in the woods, away from people.*

And so he moved along, covering the miles, seeing fewer and fewer signs of civilization the further he went. *I haven't seen a road all morning*, he realized, staring at this new clearing. *Haven't seen a house in almost a day.* There was nothing but forest now. Mile after mile of untouched timber.

Not a McDonald's in sight.

What do I eat? Jay had never spent much time in the woods. His whole life—what he remembered of it—had been centered around the school and his 'father's' experiments. *I don't know how to live off the land*, he realized. *Don't have a clue as to what's edible and what isn't.*

For a moment, he considered giving up, going back, telling Dr. Caldwell that it had all been a mistake, that he was willing to cooperate in the... *What did Sweet call him?* He paused to pull the word out of his memory. *Oh, yeah.* The experiments of a Progenitor mage!

And what about my mother—stuck in that damned tank! Jay's mouth set. There was no way he could cooperate with anyone who'd treat her like that. *I've got to find a way to free her!* He looked around the little clearing. *But first, I've got to find something to eat!*

At first he'd assumed that finding food would be

easy. *After all, I'm a damned werewolf!* But Jay soon found that he did not know how to trigger the change—and his shapeshifting heritage didn't make him any better as a hunter or woodsman. *I've got to find help. Someone who can teach me what I have to know.* Jay glared at the trees around him as if they should reveal what he needed, then, shrugging, he picked up the light pack that was all he had carried from the school. *I should have raided the refrigerator before I left!* He had considered doing so, but had decided that it was safest to leave immediately and live off the land. *I've certainly done a fine job of that!*

He headed south, taking his direction from the sun. *Odd that they haven't come after me yet.* He frowned. *I wonder what they're planning....?*



"Gone?" Dr. Caldwell almost leaped out of his seat, glaring at the other occupant of the office. "How can Jay be gone?"

Colonel Sweet shrugged, ignoring the scientist's anger. "Apparently he just packed a knapsack and left." The Colonel sat back in his chair. "There is some evidence that he saw somethin' he shouldn't have."

Caldwell began to pace the room. "What kind of evidence?"

"His scent is in the locker room."

"Shouldn't it be?"

Colonel Sweet smiled and shook his head. "Not as strongly as it is." He gestured with an open hand. "Scents degrade, especially when they're left on concrete or metal." The big man sniffed delicately. "This particular scent was fresh. No more than twelve hours old."

The scientist did the math. "Then he must have been there sometime last night..."

The Colonel nodded. "Yes. I believe he was there after dark—when my special class was in session."

Caldwell stopped pacing, stared at the Colonel. "If that's true, he must have seen all of you while you were in—what do you call it?—Crinos form."

Another nod. "I must make that assumption."

"I thought all your kind had enhanced senses." The scientist raised an eyebrow. "Didn't anyone hear him?"

"No—and that fact is quite interesting in itself." The Colonel rubbed his chin. "He must have been *incredibly* quiet." His trademark smile reinserted itself. "Which is not at all what you would expect if an ordinary boy came across a meeting of monsters!"

The scientist's eyes narrowed. "Jay's not normal."

"I know that." The Colonel leaned forward. "Which is why I took a moment to look around your *special* laboratory...."

"That's off limits!"

Another smile. "Not, apparently, to Jay."

Caldwell's expression changed, closed up. "He was down there?"

He's afraid! The thought pleased the big officer, who nodded, his face revealing nothing. "Judgin' by his scent, he was there sometime last night."

"He must have seen the test subjects." Dr. Caldwell sank into his seat, muttering. "Even his..." The scientist looked at Colonel Sweet. "What should we do?"

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders. "That's up to you. It's your project."

The mage's gaze became unfocused. "*We should* kill him."

"But you don't want to do that."

"No. Jay's too valuable. I'd much prefer to have him back." Caldwell's face went hard. "But we can't afford to let him talk to any outside Garou."

"If we dispose of him, won't it affect your timetable?"

"Yes..." The scientist nodded, reached for his notebook. "But there might be something I can do about *that!*" He leaned forward, made a notation. "If I decant his brother immediately, speed his development along with an accelerated learning program..."

"There's nothing I can do to help there." Sweet's

face showed his discomfort. "What do you want me to do about Jay?"

"Send someone to track the boy down." Caldwell never looked up, eyes busy with a new set of calculations. "Someone whom you can trust to find him and either bring him back or permanently silence him."

Sweet nodded and pushed himself to his feet. "I think Mr. Gianetto might relish that job."

Caldwell nodded, all his attention fixed on his notebook. "I'll leave that up to you." The scientist was still making notes as Sweet left—and never saw the sneer of derision on the big man's lips.



Well, Jay thought, sitting with his back against a tree, looking up into a rapidly clouding sky. I never thought I'd end up like this! A raindrop fell, spattering his upturned face. Starving to death in the middle of nowhere! Another raindrop hit him, a third... And wet to boot! Jay smiled and opened his mouth. But at least I won't die of thirst.

The rainstorm was brief, as most were this time of year. Jay licked the last of the water off his face, then struggled to his feet. *Got to find something to eat!* He stumbled forward. *Must be something around here. Keep moving forward,* he told himself. *Just put one foot in front of the other. Repeat...*

Jay forced himself forward, stumbling through low-lying scrub brush, splashing through the tiny puddles that were all that remained of the recent rain. *Just a little farther...* He was running out of energy; the lack of food was taking its toll on his young body.

A few more yards... Jay stumbled. *Fell. Got to get up!* He reached out, tried to get his hands under his body...

And felt something crumple under his weight.

Jay shook his head, tried to clear his blurry vision. *That felt like...* He looked down. *Mushrooms!* A field of gray umbrellas spread before him, lying in the shade of several tall trees. *Can I eat them? Are they poisonous?* A rueful smile crossed his face. *Does it matter?*

Jay picked one of the mushrooms closest to him and examined it. *What am I looking for?* He smiled. *A tag that says USDA Inspected?* Jay shrugged, sniffed at the fungus. *Smell's okay.* He took a bite. *No taste at all.* He shrugged again. *I've got to eat something!* He put the whole thing in his mouth. *If it kills me, it kills me.*

It didn't.

Jay ate more mushrooms in the next thirty minutes than he had eaten in his whole life. *Too bad there's not a rare steak to go with them!* Steak or not, Jay was happy to have *something* filling his stomach.

Finally, happily full and drowsy, Jay found a soft patch of ground, spread out his poncho—*Glad I grabbed something useful from the school*—and stretched out for a little sleep. As he lay down, he looked up at the sky. The earlier cloud cover had dissipated, and the moon was just rising. *First quarter tonight*, Jay noted. *It fits. I'm still about a quarter alive.* He forced the thought out of his mind, allowing only the resolve to save his mother to remain. *I've got to survive*, he thought. *There's no other way!*

He fell asleep just as the moon reached its zenith.



Boy!

Jay awoke with a start. *What was that?* He looked around, feeling normal for the first time in days. *My stomach's not growling!* He sat up. The woods around him were pitch black, not a glimmer of light penetrating their umbrella. *The moon must be down*, he thought, looking up through an open spot toward the tiny patch of visible sky. *But there sure are a lot of stars....*

Boy! Pay attention!

Who is that? Jay leaped to his feet, looked around. There was nobody, nothing in sight. *I don't understand....*

Something struck him on the shoulder, a sharp,

stinging rap. Jay whirled, dropped into a fighting crouch as he searched for the source of the blow.

And was hit again—this time on the knees. *I told you to pay attention!* He staggered to one side—and tripped as something unyielding was thrust between his knees.

Jay fell heavily, landed on ground suddenly hard enough to knock the breath out of him. He lay there for a second, fighting for air, then, unwilling to give up, started to roll to one side, struggling to gather his feet under him.

He was blocked. Something thin and hard dug into his side. He looked over his shoulder, craning his neck to see what it was. *Wood.* He squinted. *A sapling?* But then it moved, flashed out of sight.

Jay, knocked off balance again, fell to the ground.
Don't move!

Jay obeyed, unable to do anything else. Slowly, the darkness around him changed. A soft glow appeared, touching the clearing with light, spreading into the forest. Jay could see the trees now, make out every blade of grass. Each seemed to have its own inner light, one that grew brighter as he watched. *They're beautiful!*

"Of course they are!"

Jay turned his head. A woman stood next to him. *Look at her! She's ancient!* She had been tall, once, but now she was bent, as if under some great weight. She held herself upright with the aid of a

great staff, which, like its mistress, was crooked but obviously possessed great strength.

There's something else... Jay looked closer. *Some kind of markings...* The staff was covered with carved symbols that looked like runes of some kind. Jay tried to decipher them, but as he stared, they changed shape, seeming to move under his gaze.

"You do not yet have the knowledge to read them." The old woman looked down at Jay, measuring him. "Perhaps someday."

"Who are you?" Jay started to rise, then thought better of it. Instead, he settled his legs under him more comfortably, and looked up at the woman.

"At least you're not stupid!" She nodded. "You may call me Dancing Star."

"Dancing Star," Jay repeated.

She nodded again. "Of the Uktena. I have many things to show you." She held out her hand. "Come." Jay reached out and grasped her fingers.



"You should know that you are no longer in the world."

Jay looked around. The forest seemed the same, just as dark, with only the light of the stars to illuminate it. "What does that mean? Am I still asleep? Is this some kind of dream?"

"Not anymore. Look behind you."

Jay started to turn, but stopped, his eyes on his companion, suddenly afraid that Dancing Star was planning to use that damned staff to trip him again. She smiled, then gestured that it was all right. He turned his head....

It seemed miles—and a finger's breadth away. A huge gemstone like no other he'd ever seen or heard of, expertly cut and polished, each facet glowing with a different, brilliant hue.

"What..." It glittered like a star fallen to earth, touching the forest with all the colors of the rainbow. He tried to pull his gaze away. Failed. "...What is it?"

He felt Dancing Star's hand touch his shoulder. "We call it the Dream Zone." Her hand moved, touched the side of his head, gently turned it, pulling his gaze away from the incredible jewel. "It is the place we came through on our way here." Dancing Star's gaze fell on Jay, suddenly serious. "It is a very dangerous place." She gave him a stern look. "Never try to enter it alone."

"But if it's part of my dreams..."

The staff moved as if alive, touched Jay's chest. "I didn't say it was *your* dream place." Dancing Star shook her head, "It's just another of the Umbral areas, open to all."

"The Umbral areas?"

Dancing Star began to move forward, motioning

for Jay to follow. "There is much more to the universe than you have been taught." She glanced back at him. "Soon, very soon, you will learn of some of them."

"Are you going to teach me?"

The old woman shook her head. "No. I am only here because Uktena asked me to lead you to a special place."

"I thought you said *you* were Uktena!"

She stopped, her face stern again as she turned to him. "No. I am of the Uktena. That is my tribe." She lifted her formidable staff, regarded it for a moment. "Once, I was their Theurge, and often traveled these paths in battle against the Wyrn."

"The Wyrn?"

"Your education has been greatly lacking." She made a gesture of dismissal. "But that will change. You will learn these things soon enough!" She turned away, began moving forward. "For now, know that Uktena herself, totem of the Uktena tribe, has commanded me to take you to a Vista."

"What's a Vista?"

"It's a sort of portal," she replied, glancing over her shoulder. "A place where travelers can see beyond the Realms." She faced forward again, concentrating on the path ahead. "There are many Vistas, all very difficult to find."

"How will you know which is the right one?"

Dancing Star pointed to the path ahead of her.

Jay could just make out a quickly moving form. *Is that a snake?*

She smiled. "Uktena will show me."

They walked for what seemed like hours, although it was hard to tell. The light never changed, and, amazingly enough, Jay grew neither tired nor hungry. Finally, at what seemed like a crossroads, Dancing Star halted. "There!" She pointed with her staff. "That is the place!"

Jay looked to the side. A deer stood there, a magnificent creature with huge antlers. On those antlers perched an owl, its golden eyes fixed on the two travelers. "Go to them!" The old woman gestured. "Quickly!"

Jay stepped toward the deer, careful to make no threatening move. "Do I say anything?"

"Just go!"

As Jay approached the animals, he saw that something glowed behind them. A discontinuity in space—an opening in the sky. As he looked, light filtered through whatever it was. Bright, white light.

"Go to the light!"

Jay stepped past the deer and owl, eyes fixed on the pure white light coming from nowhere. *What is this?* He reached the point from which the light was coming. A man stood there. He was tall and high-browed, with flowing black hair and ritual scars covering his bare chest and arms. *Who...*

That is your father. The voice came from everywhere, inside Jay's head. *He was betrayed by the man called Caldwell.* He turned, found the calm eyes of the deer fixed on him. *If he is not stopped, the knowledge that Caldwell has gained can destroy all.* Behind Jay, the light dimmed slightly. Jay turned, watched as the form of his father faded....

Only you have the power to defeat Caldwell. His father's eyes opened, fixed on Jay. The tall figure smiled, nodded...

Disappeared.

Only you...



Jay awoke, the sun in his eyes. He was in the forest, bits of mushroom scattered around him. *It wasn't real.* Deep disappointment flooded through him. *Just a dream!* He rolled onto his stomach, felt it convulse. *Probably caused by those damned mushrooms!* He struggled with his conflicting emotions. *I've always wondered about my mother and father.... Oh well.* He put a hand out, ready to push himself upright.

And touched something—a long wooden pole.

What's this?! He squirmed around, looked at the shape beside him. *It's her staff! She was real!* He squinted into the darkness of the forest. *Dancing*

Star was real! His heart skipped a beat. That means...

It was all real! My father, my mother... He shook his head. But where is Dancing Star? She must be around somewhere! He looked at the ancient sigils on the staff. She'd never leave this behind....

But there was not a soul around that he could see. Finally, convinced that he was alone, he worked up the nerve to pick up the staff. Nothing unusual happened. The wood was warm, inviting. Jay closed his hand around it, discovered that it was just the right size for his palm. *Amazing!* He held it close so he could get a better look at the signs carved into the wood. *They're beautiful; so ornate!* He traced the markings with his fingers, fixing them in his mind's eye. *This one has to be a cat!* He recognized the upturned eyes, the stiff tail. *And this one is a snake!* The long, undulating line could be nothing else. *But these others...* They suggested nothing to him. *Perhaps when I learn more, I'll know what they mean.*

Jay looked around the clearing again. *Dancing Star must be somewhere around here!* But there was no sign of anyone. He sighed. *Do I wait for her to come back? Or do I move on?* He held the staff aloft, looking to it for an answer.

"You put that thing down now, boy." The voice came from his right. "Careful-like."

Jay's head snapped around. He saw a man

standing at the edge of the clearing, a rifle, pointed at Jay's midsection, held to his shoulder.

"Put it down, I said!" There was an audible *click* as the safety came off.

Jay carefully placed the staff on the ground. "I..." he licked his lips, tried to work moisture into his mouth. "I'm sorry if I was trespassing."

"Sorry don't cut it, boy!" The man came forward, moving directly in front of Jay. *He looks like a rat!* Jay realized. He was small, with long, greasy hair and teeth that protruded slightly between his lips.

Rat or not, the man's aim never wavered; the barrel of his rifle always pointed right at Jay's stomach. "Who are you, boy?" He stopped, leaned his shoulder against a tree, the rifle rock-steady. "What are you doin' here?"

"My name is Jay..." *No! I won't use his name anymore!* "Jay Smith. I'm on winter recess—thought I'd camp out."

"With no tent or sleepin' bag?" The ratty man smiled, exposing the rest of his teeth. Like the front ones, they were ratlike—large and discolored. "I don't think so!"

Jay shrugged. "I don't know what else I can tell you."

The gun came up again. "You might try the truth."

Jay kept silent.

"Okay, boy." Ratman ran a filthy fingernail between two teeth, trying to pick a stuck piece of *something* out. "I guess I'll just have to take you with me." He stood up, wiping the finger on his pants. "C'mon, now—you don't wanna give me no trouble." He wiggled the barrel of his rifle for emphasis.

Why can't he leave me alone! Jay attempted to bottle up the sudden spurt of anger, started to move—and then remembered Dancing Star's staff. *Can't leave that here!* He took a step back, bent over, touched the wood of the shaft...

And was smashed to the ground by the butt of the little man's rifle.

"I told you to put that thing down!"

"But it's valuable!" Jay wiped a spot of blood off his lip, felt the anger rise again, stronger now. "I can't just leave it here!"

"You'll do what I tell you!" The man looked down at the staff. "It's just an old walkin' stick." He picked it up, inspected it, sneered at the carving. "Ain't worth nothin'!" He lifted a foot, carefully keeping the gun trained on Jay. "Let's just make sure there ain't anythin' to argue about." He put his foot over the half-raised staff, ready to step down and splinter the ancient wood.

"No!" Rage flooded through Jay, followed by a stab of pain.

And the world transformed.

Jay found himself looking down on the ratty man, who had dropped the staff in shock and was staring at Jay, mouth open, eyes fearful. *I've changed!* Jay held up his hands. Ratman sobbed and dropped to his knees. *Look at the size of my hands!* He began to claw at the dirt, trying to dig a hole. *And these claws!*

Jay discovered that he could smell the other man now, an odd mixture of sweat, rotting meat, and something else... *Laundry detergent!* Ratman had excavated a shallow trench now, and was trying to worm his way into it. *It's—what did Heidel tell me it was called? Oh, yeah—the Delirium.* Jay picked up the rifle the other had dropped in his initial shock—he *won't be needing this*—and, without thinking about it, effortlessly snapped the weapon in half—metal barrel and all. *Wow!* He looked at his hands again, impressed by his own strength. *That was easy as pie!*

He left ratman still trying to bury himself and picked up Dancing Star's staff. That was when he noticed something else.

My clothes! The rags of his outfit were scattered about. He looked down, saw that he was naked except for the tattered remains of boots still clinging to his feet. *I must have burst right out of them!* Jay padded over to the tree he had leaned against the night before and picked up his

knapsack. *What am I going to do? I only have one other set of clothes with me!* He shook his head. *This werewolf stuff is tougher than I thought!* Jay took a moment to look around the clearing, making sure he hadn't forgotten anything. *Nope. Got it all.* He put his arm through the strap of the knapsack, let it hang there. *Why am I worrying about clothes anyway?* He strode into the woods. *I'm not even sure I can change back into a human!*

Behind him, the ratman's hole grew deeper.



Changing from Crinos back into human form turned out to be less of a problem than Jay expected. As he had heard the voices say so many times, the key was concentration. *It's easy!* he thought as he felt himself shrink down to human shape once more. *Now, if only I could figure out a way to get my clothes to change with me.*

That was beyond his power at the moment. But he quickly learned the virtues of the things he *could* do. He had at first been shocked to find that in Crinos form he had a tail. But he soon discovered that the tail helped him maintain balance. *After all,* he realized, *I'm nearly nine feet tall!* He discovered that in Crinos, his senses were sharpened considerably, and that cuts and bruises healed in moments.

He also learned to shift to full wolf form, although it became clear that four-legged creatures could not carry a staff. *And if I lose it, Dancing Star will kill me!*

So he settled on the Crinos form, and, as he became more familiar with the shape, began to trot, using his cross-country skills in a new way.

The miles rolled by. Jay kept to the backwoods, avoiding highways and towns. When in Crinos form, he could easily fish in the streams and lakes he encountered. He stopped going hungry.

But he still had no plan. No way to strike back at Caldwell or rescue his mother. *I have to find someone who can help me!* But didn't know whom he could trust. He kept hoping that Dancing Star would reappear, tell him what to do next.

She never did.

Finally, as he jogged down a rutted and abandoned wagon track somewhere in the Florida Panhandle, something happened. A deer appeared, seemingly by magic, at the side of the road. It was a huge buck, with an antler rack that had some twelve points. *Look at that!* Jay came to a halt, studying the animal. *I could eat off that for a week!*

A sudden pain shot through his right hand. *Ow!* He almost dropped Dancing Star's staff. *Something burned me!* He held the artifact gingerly, looking it over. One of the sigils was white, glowing as if lit from within. Jay reached toward the sign. *It's hot!*

He pulled his hand back, stuck the staff into the soft sand of the path. *But how...?*

Then he really looked at the staff—and recognized the sign that was glowing. *It's a deer!* He looked up. The big buck still stood there, waiting. *Uktena?* The sigil grew brighter. Jay nodded and quietly approached the deer. "All right." His speech was slurred, difficult in this form. "I guess I'm supposed to follow you." The sign glowed brighter still. "Lead on."

The deer tossed its magnificent head and turned, heading down an almost invisible path through the wood.

Jay followed.

The shack at the end of the path looked as if it had been there for a hundred years. Jay could see cracks between the slats of wood that made up the walls. *Must be cold here in the winter*, he thought as he raised his eyes a bit, staring at the holes in the roof. *And wet.* Still, Uktena had led him here. *There must be a reason.* Jay shifted to Homid form, put his last set of clothes on, and walked the last hundred yards down the path toward the little house. *If I'm not crazy.*

He was halfway there when the shotgun fired.

D

Gianetto stopped as he reached the clearing

where Jay had spent his first night. He looked around. *Not a bad spot.* He stood on tiptoe, peering over the brush. *Good cover. No roads nearby.* He sniffed the air. *Can't smell any humans.* The big senior nodded. *Kid's doing okay—staying away from civilization, making himself hard to find.* Gianetto looked down at the campsite. *Always in Homid form, though.* He shook his head. *Slow.* A smile crept across his face. *Weak.*

Gianetto rose to his full height, began moving forward. *Maybe he doesn't know how to change yet!* He scratched at the brow ridge over his missing eye—it always itched. *Not much of a match for me.* His teeth seemed to grow, becoming longer, sharper. *Too bad!*



Jay froze in place, his eyes fixed on the little hole the shotgun blast had cut into the path. *What is it with me running into guys with guns?* He slowly forced his gaze up toward the house—the point the shot had come from. *I thought Uktena was supposed to know what he was doing!* Jay caught a flash of movement from the corner of his eye. He turned a little to check it out. It was the big deer, standing in the fringes of the woods, staring at him with lambent eyes. Jay looked into those eyes—and felt peace flow into his body. *I guess he does...*

"What do you want?"

Jay shook his head. The deer was gone. Instead, he was looking over the barrel of a shotgun into the darkest brown eyes he'd ever seen.

"Did you hear me?"

"I heard you." Holding the shotgun was the prettiest girl Jay had ever seen. *And now I'm going to sound like a nut! Still...* "You're not going to believe me," Jay took a deep breath, "but Uktena led me here."

The brown eyes opened wide, startled. The girl moved her head, just a hair, to glance into the woods. Then she dropped the gun. "You're one of us, then."

Jay furrowed his brow. "One of who?"

The girl looked him in the eye. "You're a Garou."



Inside, the little house was every bit as uncomfortable as Jay had expected. The girl motioned him to a seat on a sofa pushed against one wall. "Beware of the loose spring."

"Excuse me?"

She smiled and pointed to a naked spring protruding from one of the sofa cushions. "Don't sit on that—it hurts." She carried the shotgun toward a rifle rack nailed to the only wall that didn't have visible gaps in it. "Where'd you learn to talk like

that?" She broke the weapon open, pulled the unused round out. "So polite and all." She put the shell into a drawer at the bottom of the rack and pulled out cleaning equipment.

"I was in school—a military academy, up north of here."

"The north part I coulda guessed." She sat down, pushed an oiled swab into the barrel of the weapon. "Now tell me, why are you here?"

Jay sat on the sofa, careful to avoid the spring. "It's a long story."

She examined the swab, shaking her head at the black streaks. "We got time."

Jay nodded. "All right." He thought back, took a breath. "I guess it started when I began hearing voices...."



I was wrong! Gianetto took a second look around the little clearing, sniffing the air carefully. *He can change.* He allowed himself to slip into Homid form, and knelt down alongside the shallow depression in the middle of the clearing. *A human dug this.* Gianetto grinned. *Must've seen the kid in Crinos form.* He shook his head. *Never saw Delirium take one like this before.* *I guess it takes all kinds,* he thought, his grin widening.

He stood up, paced around the clearing. *Kid slept*

over there, he realized, noting the remains of the mushrooms. *Must've eaten those.* Gianetto made a face. *Fungus! Ugh!* He took a step to the side, glanced at the trees. *Human came out of the woods here.* He kicked the remnants of the rifle aside. *Had a gun, pointed it at the kid.* He stepped back, noted the rags on the ground, the torn bits of canvas and rubber. *The kid changed, and he obviously hasn't learned to dedicate his clothing.* Gianetto grinned. *Baby must be cold!* he thought smugly. His eyes came back to the depression. *The man panicked...*

Then *what?* Gianetto dropped into Lupus form, sniffed around the site. *Kid went this way—still in Crinos form.* His nose came up. *Human went that way.* Gianetto's lip curled. *Kid must've let him go!* He shook his head. *And after the human pointed a gun at him!* He stepped forward, began to trot along the path Jay had taken, the scent fresh in his nostrils. *Foolish.* His teeth glinted. *I'd never make that mistake!*

He can't be too far ahead. Gianetto picked up his pace. *If I hurry, I might be able to finish this by nightfall!*



"...And the deer led me here." He looked up. "The rest, I guess, you know."

The girl set the shotgun back into its spot on the

rack, tossed the swab into a trash can underneath. "And you got that staff from someone named Dancing Star?"

Jay hefted the staff. Its sigils were faint in the shadows. "That's right. She left it with me after she led me into the Umbra."

The girl scratched her head. "Well, Dancing Star's Uktena right enough." She looked at him, brown eyes drawing in all the light around them, filling his universe. "I've been hearing stories about her since I was old enough to understand."

"Stories?!"

"Yeah." The girl shrugged, got to her feet. "Old stories." She looked down at Jay. "Dancing Star's been dead since before the Wyrmbringers came to this country."

"Wyrmbringers?"

"S'what we call the white settlers."

"Oh." Jay stared at her for a moment. "Then you're an Indian—I mean, Native American."

She nodded. "Name's Anitra—Anitra Woodfriend." She held out a hand. "My Dad's half-Seminole."

Jay took the hand gently. "I'm Jay." He made a face. "Just Jay—no other name."

"I understand." The brown eyes were soft with pity. "And you've come here for help."

"If I can get it."

"Father will do what he can."

Jay held up the staff. "I don't understand what you said earlier." He searched her face. "You said that Dancing Star was *dead*."

"She'd kinda hafta be after four hundred years."

"You're right. But if that's true," Jay ran his fingers over the staff's sigils, "where did I get this?"

Her eyes met his. "I was kinda wonderin' about that myself." She sat down next to Jay, her gaze steady on his face. "Father will be back soon. He'll know a way to puzzle all of this out."

"Where is he?" Jay stared back, memorizing every line of her face.

"He's around." She smiled at the look on his face. "Checking the bane-bonds."

"Bane-bonds?"

"You don't know anything, do you?"

The door crashed open as an eight-foot tall monster leaped into the room, brandishing a blade. "Nooo," it lisped. "And hee never will!"



What the hell? Jay jumped to his feet, gripping the staff tightly, as the beast charged into the room. He recoiled in shock as the monster leaped toward him, weapon slashing at his belly. He felt the sting of the blade. *Bastard!*

And suddenly Jay was in Crinos form, snarling at his opponent. *Well, that's it for my clothes!* He

ducked back, kicking off the remnants of his shoes as the shiny blade licked toward him again. *That's another Garou!* he realized, dodging the strike. *Could it be the girl's father?* Another slash. Jay parried this one with the staff, his long hours of bayonet training at the academy automatically coming into play. *Why would he want to hurt me?*

His opponent backed away, searching for an opening. *He's only got one eye!* Jay realized—and understanding swept through him. *Gianetto!* He snarled. *Caldwell must have sent him to come after me!* Jay set his feet, letting the staff hang lightly in his hands. *Well, he's not going to get me without a fight!*

Gianetto picked that moment to lunge forward, sweeping his blade in a series of figure-eights. Jay backed away, ducking most of the blows, parrying others with desperate speed. For a moment, it looked as if he would blunt the attack, but then Gianetto managed to sneak a backhand under Jay's defense, scoring a long cut across the boy's chest. He was bleeding profusely.

"You can't run away from me, Caldwell!" Gianetto spoke in a language Jay had never heard before—but which he somehow instinctively understood. "I'll pee on you again after you're dead." Fangs showed in a bestial grin. "Only this time, I'll do it in your face!" The creature moved his head slightly, single eye glancing to the side.

"And then I'll introduce myself to your lady friend!"

Don't let him get you mad. Jay took a deep breath and sized up his opponent. *I've got the reach advantage.* He hefted the staff, balancing it in his hands. *Especially with this.* He saw the other Garou's muscles bunch as he prepared a new attack. *He's older. Better trained.* Jay eyed the blade. *And he's got that knife. There's got to be something I can do about it....*

Gianetto leaped forward, howling a challenge as he feinted high, then brought his blade down, stabbing at Jay's stomach.

Jay stood his ground, ignored the feint. *Kid stuff.* Instead he swept the staff forward, hard and low. He felt the moment of impact as the staff's rawhide-wrapped and weighted end struck hard against Gianetto's hand. There was a flash as energy flowed through the staff—followed by a high-pitched scream of pain. Jay grinned. *Maybe the knife's not as big an advantage as I thought!*

Gianetto backed away, staring in disbelief at his suddenly useless right hand. It was burned black, the talons curled and charred. He screamed again, his voice filled with rage and pain, then he dropped the knife from his maimed hand and leaped, fangs bared, for Jay's neck, single eye glowing with madness.

Jay stumbled back, hurriedly sweeping the staff

in front of him—but he wasn't fast enough. His weapon passed *under* the suddenly airborne Garou, and then Gianetto was on him, claws raking at Jay's chest, fangs searching for his unprotected throat.

Jay dropped the staff—*too close for this*—and brought his own claws into play, raking at his opponent's belly. The two fell to the floor, rolling over one another, as each tried—and failed—to get on top.

Gianetto cut into Jay's stomach, pulled his head back, ready to snap his fangs into the boy's throat. Jay fought back, too angry to feel any pain. *Why couldn't he leave me alone!* Gianetto lunged—and missed. Jay snarled and used his own teeth, caught Gianetto's ear between his own fangs, bit down hard, pulled...

Gianetto roared as the ear ripped. He released his hold and rolled free, smashing into the couch that stood against the wall. He lifted his charred hand to his wound in a vain attempt to stop the bleeding. The one-eyed Garou pushed himself to his knees, prepared to leap again.

Then his hand touched the silvery knife, lying there on the floor,

"I will kill you!" Hope sprang into Gianetto's single, hate-filled eye. He struggled to his feet, the knife held in front of him, preparing to make the death blow.

Jay, too, was on his feet, shaking Gianetto's blood

out of his eyes. Rage poured through him, reddening his vision, filling his body with steadily increasing strength. "I don't think so!" he snarled at his opponent.

Gianetto leaped forward, knife-arm raised for one final thrust.

But Jay didn't wait for the attack. Instead, he rushed forward to meet his attacker in the middle of the room. Catching the upraised arm, he held the knife at bay.

For a second, the two Garou stood there, face-to-face, chest to chest. Growling, they fought for control of the weapon, each snapping at the other. Finally, inexorably, Gianetto's more mature form began to prevail. The knife inched down, closer and closer to Jay's chest. The younger Garou snarled, pushed it away again and again—but each time it returned, and came closer.

I can't hold him! The thought ripped through Jay's mind—and was replaced by a picture of his mother, and all the others imprisoned in Caldwell's hellish laboratory. *No!* His mother's face floated before him. *I won't give up!*

Jay made one last effort. He ripped his left hand free of Gianetto's grip and drove his claws into the other's face. Once again he felt the jellylike texture of an eyeball as his finger dug in. Once again he touched brain.

This time, with all his newfound strength, he

closed his claws—digging them into the bone that surrounded Gianetto's punctured eye—and ripped.

Gianetto didn't have time to scream. He just crumpled, his skull torn into ragged halves, his face gone.

What was left of his brain dripped slowly onto the dirty floor.

Jay stood over the body, gasping for breath. The rage was gone now, replaced by an exhaustion that reached to the very core of his being. *I killed him*, Jay thought dully. *Pulled his face apart*. He gulped at the stuffy air of the cabin. *Is that why I feel so bad?*

Nearby, the girl took a tentative step in Jay's direction, the look on her face as she stared at him a mixture of horror and respect. He saw her, turned toward her, tried to apologize—but nothing would come. There was just too much pain. His chest was on fire, paralyzed with increasing agony. *What's wrong with me?* Jay looked down—and saw the hilt of a knife protruding from his chest. He tried to raise his hand to pull the blade out, but suddenly there was nothing left. No strength, no breath. Nothing. *I'm sorry, Mother, Dancing Star...* He fell to his knees. *So sorry...*

Blackness claimed him.



"Gianetto has failed."

"We don't know that!" Colonel Sweet leaned back in his chair, bit back a smile as a loud *creak* filled the office. "It may have taken longer than expected to track Jay," he said. "There may have been complications we know nothin' about..."

Dr. Caldwell leaned forward, eyes hard. "Don't try to stonewall me." The mage indicated the computer on the edge of his desk. "The records show that Gianetto contacted you yesterday."

Sweet inclined his head in agreement. "To tell me that he was on the trail."

"No!" Caldwell shook his head. "He told you that he had found the boy—and was mere hours behind him."

The Colonel's face hardened. "You had my phone tapped?"

"My AI monitors every call that comes in and goes out." Caldwell's face was stone. "It prevents... misunderstandings."

"All right." Sweet leaned back, hands interlaced. "As you say, Gianetto *did* call me yesterday. He told me that he expected to find your son within a few hours." The Colonel looked up. "That, of course, doesn't mean he actually did. Perhaps the boy was movin' faster than expected." Sweet shrugged. "Or perhaps Gianetto was merely exaggeratin' his own prowess." He met the scientist's eyes. "Braggin' to impress me."

"That all sounds plausible enough." Caldwell sat

back in his chair. "And, if correct, would mean that Gianetto should be contacting you quite soon."

"Within the next day or so, I would assume."

The mage nodded. "Twenty-four hours." His eyes met Colonel Sweet's and held them. "If there's no word, you will assume Gianetto *has* failed and take the necessary steps."

The big officer rose. "Agreed." He headed for the door.

"And Colonel..."

Sweet stopped, turned. "Sir?"

Caldwell's smile was hard. "Next time, send someone my son will have a bit more trouble dealing with."

The Colonel raised an eyebrow. "You have a candidate in mind?"

"Send Mr. Heidel." The mage's smile widened. "He was Jay's best friend, was he not?"

Sweet nodded slowly. "I believe so."

"Send him, then." Caldwell turned to his computers. "A confrontation between best friends is always..." The scientist stroked his beard. "...instructional."



An iron hand slapped on the door.

Reveille! Jay thought, his eyes snapping open as he struggled against the sleep that was fogging his

mind. *Have to get up!* Then he saw the light filtering in through holes above his head—and the memories flooded in.

I'm in that raggedy shack in the middle of nowhere. He remembered the fight, remembered the knife stuck deep in him. Involuntarily, his hand moved up his chest, stopping when his fingers touched a puckered scar. *And I'm still alive!* He closed his eyes again, the rest of the memories slowly filtering back in. *But Gianetto's dead.* He rubbed at his face. *And I killed him...*

"Just stay where you are for now." The girl's voice came from close beside him. Jay turned his head—and was warmed by the concern in her dark eyes. "Don't try to move yet."

"What..." He licked his lips. "What happened?" The girl smiled. "We were hoping you could tell us!"

"We?"

She nodded. "My father came back right after you collapsed." She pulled the blanket a bit higher, nearly to the wound in his chest. "Luckily for you." She touched the scar gently, sending shivers through him. "He's a healer."

"I don't understand."

"You will." She looked to the side. "He's just fixin' the truck, then he'll be in to talk to you."

Jay lay there for a moment, searching inside himself. *There's no pain!* He put his hands down,

pushed himself to a sitting position. *At least, not from the wound...* He sighed, absently noticed the girl backing away. *Now why...*

Then he realized the reason. *My clothes!* He pulled the blanket over himself. *I lost my last set of clothes!*

"Daddy says there's something you can do with your clothes—he calls it 'dedicating' them—so they don't tear off when you change." She giggled. "I think you should learn that as quickly as you can!"

Jay smiled. "Thanks," he said as he looked down at his chest, searching for the wound the knife had made. It took longer than he would have thought. *It's almost healed!* He stared at the inch-long mark, still red and slightly puckered, but already whitening, the flesh smoothing. "This is amazing!"

"Not really," said a voice from across the room.

Jay turned to look at the figure standing in the doorway—a compact human shape dressed in dungarees and a work shirt. The man stepped forward, into the light, and Jay could see an ageless face, seamed and leathery from long exposure to the elements. An oddly shaped cigarette dangled from the man's mouth.

"I am called Thomas Woodfriend." His voice was low and steady as he pointed toward the girl who still stood alongside Jay. "You've already met my daughter, Anitra."

His eyes, dark and slightly angled, met Jay's. "She says you are called Jay...?"

Jay sat up as straight as he could, being careful to keep the blanket above his waist. "I am... uh, I guess I'm *just* Jay—that's short for Jason." He thought for a second. "I don't know my father's surname."

Woodfriend nodded and moved farther into the room. "It is obvious that you are Garou." A sly smile crossed his lips. "Your actions yesterday proved that." He hunkered down next to Jay, as close to eye level as possible. "What tribe are you from?"

Jay looked into the black eyes of the healer. *Better not to lie to this man!* He took a moment to put his thoughts in order. "Up until a few days ago, I didn't know there were such things as tribes...."

Eyebrows raised over those black eyes.

"Then I met someone." Jay suddenly remembered the artifact he had carried so far, and glanced about the room, searching for it. "The staff!"

Woodfriend made a motion with his hands. "It is safe." He leaned forward, eyes glittering. "Where did you get it?"

"It belongs to a woman called Dancing Star." Jay met the other man's gaze. "She said she was a Theurge of the Uktena."

Woodfriend nodded.

"She came to me in a dream." He looked sheepish. "I know that sounds silly."

"Not to me." The smaller man's face was serious. "Or to any Garou."

"Oh." Jay thought that over. "Well, she found me in the forest and led me into a place called the Umbra."

Another nod.

"She took me to something called a Vista—where she showed me my father." He looked into the healer's face. "Afterward, she was gone. I woke up alone, in the woods, but the staff was there with me." He smiled. "It helped me beat Gianetto."

"How?"

"I took bayonet training in school—everyone had to—but I was never all that good." The smile became a grin. "Certainly not good enough to stop an eight-foot monster with a knife!"

"It wasn't a knife."

Jay stared at the other man. "What was it?"

Woodfriend held out a hand and the girl moved to his side, pulling the weapon in question from a sheath hidden somewhere under her dress. "We call this a klaive—ours are carefully constructed, through ritual and dangerous labor." He looked at Jay. "They're rare weapons, hard to come by."

Jay shrugged. "It still looks like a knife to me."

The older man inclined his head. "See the blade?" He pointed to the edge, careful not to

touch it. "It's made of silver." He shook his head. "Difficult for one of us to make—and painful."

Jay stared at it. "I thought silver was deadly to werewolves."

Woodfriend nodded. "It is." He handed the klaive back to Anitra. "Now, how exactly did the staff help you?"

"Well," Jay ran through the fight his mind, "I was parrying all of Gianetto's moves—even though I'm really not good enough to do that."

"And?"

"And when I made actual contact with his body, the staff flashed for an instant..." Jay remembered the other Garou's hand. "...And burned the flesh right off his hand."

"A powerful fetish." The older man's eyes were suddenly far away. "We have long thought it lost." He turned his gaze back to Jay. "Odd that it would find its way to a Garou without a tribe."

Jay sat up straight. "I have a tribe." He looked Woodfriend in the eye. "I'm of the Uktena."

The old man held his gaze. "I thought you might say that." He stood up. "Anitra will find some clothes you can use." His eyes twinkled. "And I'll show you how to dedicate them so they don't keep ripping off."

Jay smiled ruefully. "Thanks."

"Don't thank me yet." Woodfriend headed toward the door. "I'm giving them to you so I can

take you to the nearest sept. The elders will have to meet you." His face went hard. "And decide what you really are."

"Gianetto has failed."

Colonel Sweet nodded, face thoughtful. "Yes, I think we can assume that's the case."

Dr. Caldwell leaned forward, his fingers drumming on the desk. "What are you doing about it?"

"Oh." The big officer leaned back in his chair, listened for the creak—nodded when he heard it. "I've already put the proper response into motion." He smiled. "After our discussion the other day, I put Heidel on an accelerated trainin' schedule." The smile widened. "He's quite competent."

"So was Gianetto."

Colonel Sweet nodded. "True, but Mr. Gianetto was harborin' a grudge." He made a gesture of dismissal. "Such things often interfere with proper fightin' technique."

Caldwell stared at the other man. "Are you saying that you *knew* Jay might beat Gianetto?"

"Well," Sweet shrugged. "It was always a possibility."

"Why didn't you send someone else?"

The Colonel's smile disappeared. "My job here is to train Garou—ready them for whatever assignments your employers might come up with." He leaned forward. "That's what I was doin' with Gianetto. He needed to settle things with your son to regain his confidence. Without that," the Colonel spread his hands wide open, "he would be useless in battle."

Caldwell's eyes burned with anger. "Your job here is to do what I tell you!" He smashed his hand into the desk. "Nothing else!" The mage leaned forward, skewering Sweet with his glare. "I want Jay eliminated. *That...*" His mouth curled. "...is an order. Do you understand?"

Sweet stood up, nodded.

"I asked you a question." Caldwell hadn't moved an inch. "Do you understand?!"

"Yes." The Colonel no longer smiling. "I understand."

"Good." The scientist sank back into his seat. "Then make it so!"



The new clothes Anitra brought fit Jay well enough—although the pants were baggy. "They belonged to a camper," she told him. "He lost them when he tried to cross the river last winter." Jay

nodded, glad to have something to wear, even if there was no underwear and the denim was new and stiff.

Later, he helped Woodfriend fill a couple of knapsacks with food and other provisions. "The sept is about a day's walk from here," the older man told him. "Less if we go in Lupus form."

Jay stopped his packing for a moment, surprised. "You're Garou?"

"Did you suppose I wasn't?" Woodfriend offered another of his sly smiles. "How would I know so much?"

"I thought maybe, being an Indi... Native American and all..." Jay stumbled over his words, embarrassed.

"You thought I was a wise old medicine man." The smile grew wider, more genuine. "Well, maybe I am—but I'm also Garou."

Jay nodded, his face turned away so the other couldn't see how red it was.

"Hey." Woodfriend slapped him on the back. "Don't feel bad about it. You've been cooped up with Wyrmbringers all your life. You've had no chance to get to learn anything more."

Jay turned toward the healer. "Once this is over, will you teach me?"

"If the sept accepts you, I'd be happy to."

"Do you think they will?"

The smile disappeared from Woodfriend's face. "Normally, it would be no problem. Lost cubs—that's what we call young Garou like you—are usually welcomed into the tribe. But you..." He gave Jay a frank stare. "To be honest, there's something wrong about you." He touched his nose. "You don't smell right."

"Fomor," Jay muttered the word, fear flooding through him.

"What's that?" Woodfriend's look was searching now. "What do you know of fomor?"

"Colonel..." Jay took a deep breath. "Colonel Sweet told me that other Garou wouldn't have anything to do with me because I was..." He hesitated. "Because I was fomor."

The old man's gaze was hard now. "Are you?"

Jay shook his head. "I don't know." He looked into the other's face, his soul visible in his wide eyes. "I don't even know what a fomor is!"



"How is the new one comin'?"

Dr. Caldwell turned, surprised to see Colonel Sweet so deep in his sanctum. "Which new one?"

Sweet motioned to the growth tanks along the wall. "Your new DNA test—Jay's brother."

"Oh." The mage walked to a control panel,

touched a series of switches. "He's almost ready to decant." A light went on. "You can take a look if you'd like."

The Colonel stood erect, eyes scanning the line of tanks, watching the forms that swam in them. "Thanks." He strode down the aisle, keeping his eyes forward. The tank with Jay's brother was just ahead, to his right. Sweet stopped in front of it, examined the form in it. *He looks about the same as the boy*, the Colonel thought. *A bit younger, a bit smaller*, the big officer nodded to himself, *but otherwise, the same*. A smile creased his lips as he thought of the other Jay, out there in the wide world. All alone with Gianetto's blood on his hands. *I hope he understands the lesson Gianetto was sent to teach him*. Sweet looked at the form in the tank. *This one will. He'll understand all the lessons. I'll make sure of that.*

The Colonel turned away, headed back toward the mage and his machines. *He'll be the perfect Garou*. His smile widened as he saw Caldwell working, eyes pressed to a binocular microscope. *Perfect enough to kill his 'father'. And leave me with the power*. His teeth gleamed in the artificial light of the room. *Enough power to take over this place, turn it into a true school for my people*. He pushed the door open. And then, *with hundreds of properly trained Garou at my side, I will destroy Pentex itself!*

Jay was disappointed that Anitra wasn't walking to the sept with them.

"No reason for her to come," Woodfriend told him, pulling the straps tight on his pack. "She's kin—but she's not a Garou."

"Garou don't breed true?" Jay was puzzled.

"Garou don't breed at all!" The old healer shook his head at the thought. "We can't." He pulled out a packet of tobacco and began to roll a cigarette. "Offspring are always deformed. Metis, we call them." He looked at Jay. "They're a sign of Gaia's disapproval."

"Then Anitra and I couldn't..."

"Didn't say that." Woodfriend shot him a knowing look. "I said you couldn't breed with another Garou. With Kinfolk, it's all right." A thin smile crossed his face. "Encouraged, you might say."

Encouraged! Jay looked back at the shack, but there was no sign of the girl's silky black hair or dark eyes at the windows.

"There'll be time enough for all this after we see the elders." Woodfriend nodded toward the shack. "Get the staff and let's go."

"You want *me* to carry it?"

"It nearly burned the hand off that other Garou." Woodfriend's smile widened. "Gianetto, you said his name was?"

Jay nodded.

"Well..." he shook his head. "I don't want to take chances with a thing like that." He pointed to the shack. "It likes *you*—so *you* carry it."

Jay rushed into the little house. The staff was sitting in the corner, just where it had been when he woke up. *Somebody moved it*, he realized. He looked around. Anitra was nowhere in sight. *Could she have done it? She sure never showed any fear of it when I was watching.* Remembering her dark eyes, he picked up the staff and headed for the door. *I hope I get to see her again.*

"Ready to go?" Woodfriend was at the edge of the wood, near a barely visible track.

"Guess so."

"Okay." The old healer melted into Crinos form, his fur a mottled red-brown. "Follow me."

Jay concentrated, changed—*it still feels so strange!*—and trotted into the woods, just behind the other man. He took one look back, just in time to see a black-haired girl wave goodbye.



"He stopped here to sleep—odd that he didn't make a fire." Paul Francis' foot, huge in Crinos form, kicked at a pile of pine branches. "That was four, maybe five days ago."

Art Heidel nodded, hand playing with the

unfamiliar hilt of the knife that hung at his hip. *It's not a knife*, he told himself. *Colonel Sweet says it's called a klaive. I might as well learn to think of it that way.* He watched as Francis prowled around the campsite, his own nose filled with the scents of Gianetto and, more faintly, Jay. *It's obvious they were here; what does Francis think he's playing at?*

"We'll keep going for a few hours." Francis studied the deer path that opened into the woods beyond the little clearing. "Make up some ground."

"Why?" Heidel's puzzlement was genuine. "We're at least four days behind. Why chance being seen?" He gestured toward the campsite. "Let's lay up here, get some food."

"No!" Francis' tone was sharp. "Colonel Sweet told us to find Caldwell as soon as possible...."

Heidel cut him off. "*Without* being seen." The big young man indicated the fields around them. "This is farming land. There'll be people out checking crops, doing chores...."

"Listen, you!" The senior moved to stand nose-to-nose with Heidel, one hand resting on the hilt of his klaive. "I'm in charge here! We'll do what I say!"

I guess now's as good a time as any to straighten this out. Heidel's stare grew dark and dangerous. "I don't think so."

"What!" Francis' mouth dropped open in shock.

"You heard me." Heidel pushed the other boy

away, then stooped to start piling up bits of wood and dried grass. "Nobody's in charge here." He grinned at the fuming senior. "We're not at the school now."

Francis growled deep in his throat. "Are you challenging me?" There was a *snick* as his knife came free.

Fool! Heidel shook his head. "There's nothing to challenge." He reached for more twigs, listening carefully, his body and mind ready. *Any second...*

There was a rustle of movement from behind. *Now!* Heidel lunged forward, rolling as he hit on his right shoulder, pivoting as he completed the roll.

There was a *thud* where he had crouched just a second ago.

"So, Paul." Heidel had regained his feet, was again facing his erstwhile partner. "In the back?" His fangs showed now, bared in amusement as much as challenge. "Are you *that* afraid of me?"

"I'm not afraid of anybody!" Francis snarled, launching himself forward, claws out, knife extended.

You should be. Heidel pivoted to his right, sidestepped the other's charge with ease—then kicked out, smashing the ball of his foot into the side of the senior's kneecap.

Francis fell to the ground howling, his momentum broken. He grabbed for the injured leg

with both hands, dropping his knife as agony flooded through him.

Heidel was on top of him in the blink of an eye, iron claws touching the other boy's throat, hard eyes boring into Francis' soul. "Next time..." Heidel let the tips of his claws touch—cutting shallowly into the senior's throat. "Be afraid."

Before the other boy could catch his breath long enough to answer, Heidel had moved away, back to the kindling. In seconds, he had a fire going. "Pull out something to eat," he ordered, looking back at Francis, his fangs barely visible. "We're staying here until *I* say its time to go!"



"How far away is your sept?" Jay wasn't tired, but the two Garou had been traveling in silence for some hours and his own thoughts had become too dark to be tolerable.

"Couple more hours." Woodfriend glanced at the darkening sky. "We should be there about moonrise."

Jay nodded, licked his lips. "Mr. Woodfriend?"

He caught a quick glimpse of his face as the older man looked back. "Call me Thomas."

Another nod. "Thomas, then." They had entered a marshy area. Jay could see water all around him. "What's a 'bane-bond'?"

Woodfriend laughed. "Where'd you hear that term?"

"From Anitra." Soft black eyes filled Jay's mind when he said her name. "When I first came to your house."

Another laugh. "That shack isn't our house!"

"It's not?"

"No." He cast a quick look back. "What do you think we are, anyway?"

"I just assumed..."

"You thought we were poor." Woodfriend shook his head. "A natural enough assumption, I guess." He stepped around a huge oak, the path barely giving him room. "Shows your Anglo upbringing."

"Then why..."

"Those bane-bonds you asked about. One of them is near the shack." Another tree blocked the path. Woodfriend shuffled around it. As he did so, one foot dipped into the water that lapped at the tree's root system. "Careful here. There are 'gators."

Jay kept a wary eye on the water while he splashed past the big tree. "Where do you really live?"

Woodfriend gave him another of his sly looks. "Ask me again after the elders accept you."

Jay nodded and sighed. "Fair enough." Another tree was just ahead. "Now about those bane-bonds..."

The healer sighed. "All right, if it'll keep you

happy." He stepped around the tree. "You know that we live on Gaia," he spread his arms, "our word for the natural world."

"Now I know."

"Well, Gaia is endangered by the Wyrms. And don't ask me to explain the Wyrms right now."

"Later?"

A nod. "Maybe." He stepped around another tree, his feet just sinking into a jutting finger of muck. "Careful, it's deep off the edge of the path." He watched as Jay negotiated the bypass. "All right, now, the Wyrms doesn't fight us outright. It creates servants—evil spirits—to do its work."

"Like ghosts and demons?"

"Close enough." Woodfriend quickened his pace. "We can speed up now. It's clear from here to the caern."

"Bane-bonds?"

"Right." He paused for a moment, thinking how best to express the concept. "A lot of those spirits, we call them Banes, are created underground, in caverns deep beneath the earth." Another pause. "Over the centuries, we of the Uktena have found a number of those caverns with the Banes still inside—unborn." He stepped over a narrow stream. "We bind the spirits before they can be awakened, to ensure that they remain asleep and harmless."

"Sounds difficult."

Woodfriend nodded. "It is. The runes and spells

must be renewed constantly." He turned to Jay. "It is the work of many Uktena Theurges."

"Like you."

"Like me." The trail swept to the right, toward a group of mangrove trees growing in what appeared to be a rough circle. "And the others in my sept." He indicated the trees. "There."

Following in the direction in which his companion pointed, Jay walked toward the circle of trees, fear and longing filling his heart.



"This was made by a human." Heidel stood over the shallow trench in the middle of the clearing. "A terrified human."

Francis shrugged. "He must've seen Caldwell and fallen into the delirium."

Heidel looked at the other boy, his eyes puzzled. "Why Jay? Why not Gianetto?"

Francis made a motion of dismissal. "The human's corpse would still be here if it was Gianetto he saw."

"Why?"

Francis snorted. "If you had spent any time in our special classes, you'd know the answer to that!"

Heidel's gaze hardened. "Why don't you enlighten me?"

Francis shrugged. "It's simple. We can never

allow the Veil to be lifted." He gave Heidel a hard look. "Surely the Colonel told you that much!"

"He did." Heidel pointed at the trench. "And it's clear that this particular human wasn't close to piercing the Veil; he *was* taken by the Delirium!"

The older boy leaned forward, the light of true belief in his eyes. "Colonel Sweet says it's better not to take chances. There are too many humans," his face twisted, "too few of us." He glared at Heidel, willing understanding. "They'd hunt us down and destroy us if they knew we existed. We can't let that happen!"

"So." Heidel studied the other boy's face. "Any human that sees us..."

"Must be destroyed!" Francis' eyes were begging for understanding now. "It's the only way we can be safe."



Night had fallen, and the still-waxing moon was just barely peeking over the horizon, when they finally reached the ring of trees. They'd been much farther away than Jay had originally thought—and much bigger than he'd ever dreamed. *Look at the size of these things! And the shape!* He couldn't stop staring at them. He was used to pines and the occasional oak. These... *They're like huge spiders!*

The trees were ancient mangroves, each with

wide-spreading branches that sprouted roots of their own. Each new root, in turn, dug into the earth like a spindly leg. The 'legs' intersected and grew between and among the legs of the tree next to it. The result was a wide, nearly solid circle of vegetation that stretched as far to either side as Jay could see.

"This is where your sept meets?" Jay continued to stare in amazement, unable to believe such things really existed.

"Inside," Woodfriend told him, an amused look in his eye. "There is a path."

Jay watched the healer as he stepped into a thin gap between trunk and root, barely wide enough for the smaller Garou's Crinos form. "Stay close now!" Woodfriend disappeared into darkness. Jay waited a second, took a deep breath, and followed.

It's like a hedge-maze! Jay realized as he followed Woodfriend's circuitous path through the twisted roots and branches of the big tree, turning to left and right as each new root appeared in their path. *I could easily get lost in here!*

Woodfriend, however, knew the way, and before long, Jay stepped through another gap—and found himself in a wide clearing. *Look at that!* The young Garou stopped in his tracks, eyes fixed on the object in the center of the clearing.

It was the mother of all mangrove trees—so huge that its roots had sprouted *another* set of limbs, each

of which had put down its own set of roots. The result was a huge, multitiered tree that stood like a skyscraper, dominating the clearing. Jay could see shapes moving through the spaces between the branches. They looked tiny when compared to the great mangrove, but Jay knew that they must be Garou, human-sized or bigger.

Woodfriend's sept.

The healer put a hand on Jay's arm, drawing him out of his reverie. "Come on, Jay." He started walking toward the huge tree. "It's time to meet the others."

Jay took another deep breath—*am I doing the right thing?*—and stepped forward. *It's much too late to worry about it now!*

The walk across the cleared area seemed to take forever. The land was boggy and wet, and every step was an effort. Near the big tree, a fire had been lit, and Jay could see four forms assembling around it.

"I know you're new to Garou society." Woodfriend strode next to him, nodding toward the group. "Be aware that one of the members of my sept is metis."

"That means he's deformed, right?"

"*She's merely different.*" Jay could feel the healer's glare. "And you *will* treat her with respect!"

Jay nodded.

After what seemed ages, Jay and Woodfriend reached the fire, and Jay could finally get a clear

look at the four figures waiting for him. Three of them were quite normal, but the fourth...

The metis was human sized, but it was clear that she was something more. A lupine muzzle jutted from the middle of her face, giving her the appearance of someone wearing a mask. Worse, her body was also half wolf. Jay tried not to stare, but the sight of a female body with eight breasts was hard to ignore. *Remember what Woodfriend told you*, Jay repeated to himself, carefully keeping his emotions from his face. *She's not a monster. Just... different.*

The healer standing at Jay's side nodded a greeting to his packmates. "This is the lost cub I told you about."

"The one with the staff?" The question came from a man who looked like nothing more than a middle-aged farmer. Like most in this part of the country, he sported a faded flannel shirt and comfortably worn jeans—but he sat cross-legged next to the metis, and Jay could see a long klaive hanging at his side. *He's no farmer!*

Woodfriend just nodded.

"May we see it?" That from a woman seated next to the *farmer*. Jay couldn't see her well, but he did note that she sported a long mane of dark red hair and wore a long—*what is that, gingham?*—dress.

"Jay," Woodfriend stepped aside. "Would you hold the staff up?"

Jay complied, turning the shaft in his hand so the others could see the sigils in the flickering firelight.

"That duz loook like Dansing Starz' staff." The metis looked beyond the staff, fixed her eyes on its bearer. "How deed yu get et?"

Jay stared back at her, and quite suddenly was able to see past the muzzle, past the deformed body. *That's not a monster!* The depth of feeling in her eyes warmed him, touched him deeply. He glanced at Woodfriend before he answered. "It was left beside me while I slept, ma'am."

"Just abandoned?" It was the middle-aged man, a searching look in his eyes.

"That's what I thought at first." Jay met those eyes. "But I've come to believe that there was another reason." Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a hint of motion from Woodfriend. *A nod?* "That I was meant to have it."

"Why do you think that?" The question came from the red-headed woman.

Jay turned to her. "Soon after I received it, I was attacked by another Garou," he nodded toward Woodfriend, "at Thomas' shack." He caught a hint of movement as the others leaned forward. "Gianetto—the one attacking—had what I am told was a klaive." The others looked toward Woodfriend, who nodded solemnly. "I had to use the staff to defend myself."

"Why does *that* make you think the staff was a gift?"

"It aided me, gave me strength in the fight." Jay swept his glance over the four elders. "And when I was in dire straits, it acted—and burned the hand of the Garou that was about to kill me." Jay held the fetish aloft; its sigils were suddenly bright, glowing without the aid of the firelight. "It burned the flesh right off his bones!"



Heidel wasn't happy with the way things were going. He and Francis had covered a lot of ground in the past day, and the scent of both Gianetto and Jay lay all over the path they'd found. Finally, they had reached a point, a shack in the middle of nowhere, where the scent changed. *Something happened here....* Heidel could feel it, deep in his soul. *But what?*

There was another scent here as well. Also Garou—but older, more established. Powerful. *And who else was involved?*

"We don't belong here." Heidel looked around uneasily.

Francis snarled at him. "This is where the trail leads, isn't it?"

"Yes," Heidel nodded. "But we're not just dealing

with Jay and Gianetto now." He turned to Francis. "Another Garou, one we've never encountered before, has spent a lot of time here."

"So what?" The senior paced around, searching the area in front of the door. "We can't worry about that! We've got a job to do."

Heidel examined the shack again. *Do I really want to go inside?* "I think we should leave."

"Are you crazy?" Francis' fur rippled as he glared at the other boy. "What do we do then? Go back and tell Colonel Sweet that we got scared by some shack?"

"There might be another trail leading away from here. We should scout around first, before we attempt to go inside."

"Forget it!" Francis stepped to the door. "We're here—let's find out what happened!" He reached for the doorknob....

"What do you want?"

Heidel whirled. There was a girl standing beside the house. A girl with long black hair and dark eyes.

She was holding a shotgun.

Before Heidel could react, Francis leaped forward, his klaive swinging in a wide arc. The girl yelled, then screamed as the weapon sliced through her arm and hand. The shotgun fell to the ground.

"What are you *doing!*" Heidel leaped to the girl's side. She was unconscious; blood was pulsing

rapidly out of her arm. *He cut an artery. I've got to stop the bleeding!*

"She saw us."

"So what?" The big cadet ripped a strip from her shirt, set a tourniquet on the stump of her right hand. "That gun couldn't hurt us!"

"She didn't go into the Delirium."

Heidel nodded. "You're right." He tightened the strip, using a stick to hold the strap in place. "What does that mean?"

"I don't know."

Heidel released the stick, made sure the tourniquet was holding. "So you just decided to kill her." He rose to his feet, his eyes burning.

"It's safer that way."

"Fool!" Heidel lashed out, his fist knocking the other off his feet. "What about the Garou scent that's all over this place? How safe is it going to be if we have to fight him?"

"It'll be okay." Francis was scared now. "There're two of us."

"Wrong." Heidel pulled out his own klaive, watching the moonlight reflect on the blade. "In a few minutes, there's only going to be one!"



"...And then I met Thomas' daughter. The rest, I believe, you already know."

"So you claim to be of the Uktena." That came from the redhead, in what Jay had come to recognize as her constantly argumentative monotone.

"Dancing Star showed me my father. She told me he was of the Uktena." Jay looked straight into her eyes. "I see no reason to disbelieve her."

"Nor do I." Woodfriend put an arm on Jay's shoulder. "I am prepared to accept him as I would any lost cub."

"I also." This from the middle-aged man.

"I muss disagree." All eyes turned to the metis. "Altho I too think hee tells tha trooth."

"There is a strange smell about him." The redhead looked squarely at Jay. "Although it is not the stench of a liar." Her nose twitched. "It's something else, something I can't place, although I've smelled it before...."

"He must be tested!" It was a new voice. Deep. Authoritative. Jay turned to its owner, the only member of the sept who had said nothing up to this point. He had glanced at the man earlier, noting only that he was a nondescript figure of medium height and weight. Now, though, he seemed to glow in the light of the half-moon, covered with signs and sigils that writhed in the silvery illumination. *He's taken his shirt off*, Jay realized. *And he's covered with tattoos—just as my father was.*

"There are too many questions about his past—

and the place from whence he came." The tattooed man gestured toward Jay. "We must be sure that this is not some trick of the Wyrmbringers." Jay could see that his eyes reflected the firelight like a cat's. "Only then can we accept him as one of us."

The others nodded in agreement, even Woodfriend.

Jay held up his hands in mute acceptance. "What do you want me to do?"

There was a flutter of activity as Woodfriend led Jay to a spot near the fire. The tattooed man had risen from his seat and was striding toward the two of them, a large pouch held ready in his hands.

"All right, Jay, I thought this might happen." Woodfriend's gaze was friendly but wary. "If you've told me the truth, you've got nothing to worry about."

Jay nodded. "I've never lied to you, Thomas."

The healer smiled tightly. "Good." He gave Jay's shoulder a squeeze. "Extend your arm, and hold your hand open."

Jay did so.

"Now..." the tattooed man had reached Jay's side, and was pulling objects out of his bag. "Change into Crinos form."

Jay shifted.

The tattooed man picked up a klaive, just like the one Gianetto had carried, although Jay could

see that this one was a bit smaller and much more ornate. "This will hurt." He turned to Jay. "Please try not to strike out at me in your pain."

Jay nodded, gritted his teeth. *Control!* he told himself.

The tattooed man knelt at Jay's side, held the klaive high for a moment, just long enough for Jay to see the reflection of the moon in its silver blade. *Crescent moon tonight.* Jay allowed his thoughts to drift away. *Just like that last night at the school.* He grinned. *It seems to be smiling at me.*

The blade came down.

White-hot pain flooded through Jay's arm. He started, looked down in disbelief, expecting to see that his hand had been severed, but it was only a minor wound, a deep cut in his palm.

"Very good." The tattooed man carefully cleaned the blade of his klaive, then, starting a chant in a language Jay had never before heard and, even in Crinos form, did not understand, turned Jay's hand over, palm down, allowing the blood to drip onto the surface of a mirror he had pulled out of his pack.

Jay watched as the blood coalesced on the silvery surface, blotting out the reflection of the moon. As soon as the oval of the mirror was covered, the tattooed man released Jay's hand and motioned to Woodfriend.

"Okay, Jay." The healer stepped forward,

touching his own hand to Jay's wound. The bleeding stopped almost immediately. "This will take a little while to heal."

"Is that because of the silver?"

Woodfriend nodded. "In part. We'll talk about it later. For now, just watch."

The tattooed man moved away, to the far side of the fire, although he never paused in his chant. He made pass after pass over the mirror, touching the blood with his fingers, moving it about in seemingly random patterns. He stared at the results for a moment, nodded, then began again, wiping the old out, creating new.

The other members of the sect gathered around him, solemnly watching the patterns as they formed and reformed.

"What're they doing?"

Woodfriend's face was set. "Looking deep into your spirit."

The chant grew louder, the passes through the blood more frequent, more violent. The mirror was too far, too obscured by bodies for Jay to see its surface now. Instead, he kept his eyes fixed on the tattooed man, trying to read something from his face.

Firelight danced over the little group, illuminating the tattoos; but as the man moved, shadows began to creep over him, darkening them, obscuring their meaning.

Then the symbols themselves began to move. Jay didn't believe it at first, told himself it was a trick of the shadows, his mind playing tricks. But as he watched, their movement became clearer. Tiny eyes, lit with something that was not reflected firelight, glowed with intelligence and power. One, clearly a big cat of some kind, turned toward Jay, its eyes catching Jay's glance, winking, then closing, seemingly satisfied.

I must be seeing things! Jay forced his gaze away. *It's the firelight, the shadows.* The mirror was suddenly visible again, facing toward Jay. He could see the blood thickening on its face, clotting in the warm closeness of the night.

The tattooed man's fingers moved one final time.

"This is the final one." Woodfriend leaned forward. "If it's a Wyrmsign, I'll have to kill you."

"And if it's not?"

"I'll take you home and begin preparing you for your rite of passage."

Jay nodded.

"Come." The healer pulled the boy to his feet. "Let us see your fate."

"Very strange." The redheaded woman was staring down, her posture showing uncertainty.

"Indeed," the middle-aged man nodded. "I have never seen such a thing before."

"It is not a sign of the Wyrmsign." The metis voice was positive.

Not the Wyrn! Jay breathed a sigh of relief. *Thank God!*

"What does the blood say?"

The tattooed man looked at Woodfriend. "He is one of us."

The healer nodded.

"And he is not."

Jay moved forward. "What do you mean?"

The tattooed man held the mirror toward them. "Here are the final signs. This one," he indicated a sigil that looked like three claw marks, "is the sign of the Garou." He looked at Jay. "It proves you are one of us." He pointed at another sign, round, with two dots in the center. "But this one is the mark of Bubasti." He looked at Jay, eyes burning. "The mark of the cat!"

"How is that possible?" Woodfriend stared at the signs.

The tattooed man shook his head. "I have never seen such a thing before." He looked at Jay. "It is as if the boy were the offspring of Wolf and Cat." Another shake of the head. "But such a thing is impossible!"

"Yet you have the proof in front of you." The monotone of the redheaded woman seemed drier than ever. "Did the spell misfire?"

"No." The tattooed man stared at the mirror. "The spell was true."

"What do we do?"

"For the moment..." He stared into the mirror. "Nothing." He looked at Jay and Woodfriend. "Let him be trained in our ways."

"Only that?" The redhead's eyes were uneasy.

"No." The tattooed man shook his head. "He must endure a rite of passage. If he succeeds, and gains renown, we will know that Uktena is watching over him." He met the redhead's eyes. "Then we will speak of accepting him into the tribe."

"And if I don't?" Jay suspected that he already knew the answer.

The tattooed man shrugged. "Then it will not matter."



Dr. Caldwell didn't look up as Colonel Sweet entered the room. "Have a seat."

The big officer sat in his usual chair. It didn't squeak. *He's had it fixed!*

"Any word from Francis and Heidel?" The scientist put his papers aside, fixed his eyes on the Colonel.

"Nothin' for two days."

"Doesn't that worry you?"

The Colonel shook his head. "No, the area they're in is pretty desolate." He grinned. "I don't suppose they've come across many pay phones."

"Didn't you give them a cellular phone?"

Another shake of the head. "Bad security. Cel phone signals can be traced."

"By whom? We're talking about one teenage boy here!" The doctor slammed a fist onto the desktop. "One who's already been missing for nearly two weeks!" He glared at Sweet. "In spite of the best efforts of your *specially trained* troops!" He sat back, breathing hard. "Jay could be anywhere by now, talking to anyone!"

The Colonel sat back. "Not anywhere. We know he's somewhere in the Florida Panhandle."

"We know he *was* in the Florida Panhandle." Caldwell's eyes burned into Sweet. "Don't you Garou have a way to get from place to place quickly?"

"Moon bridges." Sweet nodded. "But to use one, the boy would have to gain access to a caern, and only another Garou could give him that."

"What if he's found another Garou to help him?"

"There's no evidence of that."

"As of two days ago!"

Sweet shrugged. "What would you have me do?"

"Send out more troops."

"Francis and Heidel..."

"Are out of touch, missing..." Caldwell leaned forward. "Maybe dead." He gestured to Sweet. "Send more of your troops. I want Jay dead *now*! Tomorrow might be too late."

Sweet shrugged and came to his feet. "All right, if that's what you want." He headed for the door. "But I think you're makin' a big mistake."

"I regrow my mistakes," Caldwell replied, returning to his work.



Jay's sleep was uneasy, troubled by dreams. Alone, he wandered the silvery wasteland of the Umbra. He knew he was searching for something—but he didn't know what it was. *I'll know it when I see it*, some part of him realized. Ahead, he saw the telltale peculiarity that was a Vista. He moved forward, reached the utter darkness of the opening, looked through....

His mother was there, swimming in the liquid environment of a container that stood in the depths of Dr. Caldwell's laboratory. As he watched, a huge Garou in Crinos form entered the lab, padded toward the tank. Before Jay could move, the creature smashed at the glass front of the cylinder, shattering the cover, letting the liquid pour out.

The Garou turned toward Jay, and for a second, he saw his father's face superimposed on the monstrous head. Then the Garou turned to face the creature emerging from the tank.

It wasn't the fragile human form of Jay's mother. Instead, hurtling out of the tank was a great, tawny

cat. It was huge, with saberlike teeth that extended over its lips, past its jaw line. The cat circled the Garou, stubby tail twitching as it stalked through the watery liquid.

Then it changed again, turned into Jay's mother, ivory flesh flashing as she swayed toward the great wolfman's form. The two embraced, held each other close, then closer, finally becoming a single entity.

Jay shivered, frightened for a reason he could not name. Then that single figure turned toward him, and he found himself gazing into the face of Dr. Caldwell. He screamed....

And was awakened by the touch of Woodfriend. "What did you dream?" He looked at the sweaty form of the boy. "Tell me."

Jay shook himself, pawed at his eyes, trying to drive the fear away. "I saw my parents." He looked into his new friend's eyes. "I saw my mother turn into a great cat."

"Yes."

"And then I saw her merge with my father, become one with him."

Woodfriend nodded. "And then?"

"The joined figure turned toward me." Jay's hands clenched. "And became Caldwell. Dr. Caldwell."

Woodfriend nodded. "It is a true dream. And it tells us much."

"What do you mean?"

"Go back to sleep if you can." The healer stood up. "I must speak to the others of this dream." He looked back at Jay. "It may help them to understand."

"Understand what?"

"Go to sleep. I'll tell you later."



"You're where?" Colonel Sweet's eyes swept over the telephone console in front of him. "A hospital?!" *Why did he have to call me here, where Caldwell's damned computer is monitoring incoming calls?* He shook his head, sighing. *No help for it now.* "Tell me why."

"Yes, sir." Art Heidel leaned back against the hard seat of the pay phone. "As instructed, Francis and I followed the trail down to the Florida Panhandle." He rubbed the back of his hand over his forehead. "It finally led us to a dilapidated shack on the edge of some marshes." Heidel realized, looking to the ceiling of the booth, that the fan was off. "The scent in front of the shack told us that another Garou, neither Jay nor Gianetto, had been there recently...."

"Are you sure of that?" Sweet's eyes flashed. *If the boy's made contact with one of the tribes...*

"I'm sure, sir." Heidel found the switch for the

fan, clicked it on. Nothing happened. "Mr. Francis wanted to burst into the shack immediately, find out if Jay was still there."

The Colonel shook his head. "Not wise."

"That was my feeling as well." Heidel flicked his fingernail against the fan housing, tried to get it spinning. "I argued that we should scout around, see if the scent trail left the place."

Sweet nodded. "Wise. Very wise."

"Perhaps." The fan spun once or twice, then stopped. "But Mr. Francis didn't agree, and before I could stop him, he moved to pull the door open."

"What was inside?"

"I don't know, sir." Heidel abandoned the fan, sat forward on his seat. "At that moment, a human girl with a shotgun appeared."

"What did she tell you?"

"Nothing." Heidel wiped at his forehead again. "Mr. Francis attacked her before she could speak—cut her hand off with his klaive."

Colonel Sweet rocked back in his chair. *Unbelievable!* "I think you'd better let me talk to Mr. Francis."

"I can't do that, sir."

The big Colonel's ears pricked. *Something's wrong.* "Why not?"

Heidel's face went hard. "Because I killed him, sir. Just before I brought the girl to this hospital."

"Mind your step!"

Jay looked at the patch of muddy water he'd been about to put his foot into. *I don't see... Oh! There it is!* Just under the water floated an alligator, six, maybe seven feet long. It looked for all the world like a log drifting in the current. "I see him!" Jay carefully stepped over the big reptile, never taking his eyes off it. Safely past, he glanced ahead at Woodfriend. "How did you know he was there?"

"Experience." The healer motioned to the marshes on both sides of the path. "Gators like to hang around the shallow water—'specially this time of year." He pointed up at the sun, almost directly overhead. "Sun keeps 'em warm." He smiled at Jay. "And, every now and then, some stupid critter comes along and steps right into their mouths!"

"Thanks for the vote of confidence."

Woodfriend chuckled. "Any time." He glanced at his wristwatch. "We're making good time. Should be home in a couple of minutes."

"Will Anitra be there?" Jay's mind was suddenly filled with dark eyes. *Smiling, I hope!*

Another chuckle. "With dinner on the fire, if she knows what's good for her." He looked over his shoulder at the younger man. "But right after we

eat, I've got to start teaching you what you need to know."

"What's that?"

"Some of it you've already heard about. The rest..." he shrugged. "It's the rudiments of what it means to be Uktena."

"Then what? The others mentioned some kind of test."

"The rite of passage. We'll talk about that as well." He pointed ahead. "That's the end of the marshes. We'll be reaching the shack in another five, ten minutes."

Jay loped along, let his mind drift, thinking about Anitra. *Thomas said certain relationships were encouraged.* He thought of the deep dark eyes and long lustrous hair—and grinned. *I hope he meant what I think he did!*

Woodfriend suddenly drew to a halt. Jay almost bumped into him before he noticed.

"Something's wrong." Thomas melted into Crinos shape. "The fire's cold."

Jay copied him, sniffing the air. *He's right!*

The healer moved forward, making no more noise than a household cat, even in the giant Crinos form. "Follow me." His eyes burned into Jay's. "Quietly."

The two Garou sped over the last few meters of marshland, sidestepping quagmires and soft spots,

seemingly without effort. *Two new scents at the shack*, Jay thought as he tested the air. *One of them's familiar....* He skidded to a stop. *Heidel!*

"What is it?" Thomas was beside him, his eyes searching the border of scrub that screened them from the house.

"I recognize that scent."

"A friend?" The healer's whole attention was fixed on Jay now.

"I used to think so." Jay shook his head. "Now, I'm not so sure."

"Do you want to go first?"

Jay nodded and started toward the band of scrub.

"I think it would be better."

The little shack seemed unchanged since Jay and Thomas had left. *But there's something different.* Jay took a step toward the door. *Blood! I smell blood!* He gripped his staff firmly; the sigils weren't glowing now. *They're not worried; maybe I shouldn't be.* A silent chuckle. *Fat chance!* Jay motioned to Thomas to follow him, then pushed the door open and strode in, his staff at the ready.

"I've been expecting you." Heidel was sitting against the far wall. "Come in."



"So," Dr. Caldwell was sitting at his desk,

punching information into a computer. "You had a call from Heidel."

"That's right." The Colonel forced himself to relax into his chair. *Not yet*, he told himself, forcing his hands to unclench. *Let him think of himself as the boss for a little while longer.* "He called me yesterday, from a little hospital on the Panhandle."

"And what," the scientist asked, continuing to tap at his keyboard, "did he have to say?"

Sweet smiled. "Haven't you listened to the tapes?"

Caldwell looked up. "I asked *you*."

"All right," the Colonel shrugged. "If that's the way you want to do it." Sweet leaned back farther, watching Caldwell's eyes flicker as the chair groaned in protest. *Not as good a repair job as you thought!* "Mr. Heidel told me that he and Francis had found signs that your son might have joined up with another Garou."

"Unfortunate if true."

"Yes," Sweet nodded. "That was my feelin' as well." He rubbed his chin, deliberately allowing the torque of the movement to coax another groan out of his chair. "However, before Heidel could discover the true state of affairs, a young woman appeared on the site."

"What did she have to say?"

"We'll never know." A rueful smile crossed the

Colonel's face. "Because at this point, Mr. Francis took an unfortunately precipitate action."

"What did he do?" Caldwell's tone was stern.

Sweet squared himself in the chair, his eyes meeting the scientist's. "He attacked the girl with his klaive. Heidel reported that he cut her right hand off."

Caldwell looked away. "Unfortunate. Especially if the girl has kin among the Garou." He shook his head. "There could be no end to the repercussions." His eyes came back to the Colonel. "What happened next?"

"Mr. Heidel took what actions he felt proper." The Colonel ticked them off on his fingers. "First, he set a tourniquet on the girl's arm—stopped the bleeding." A smile and another finger. "Second, he made it clear to Mr. Francis that he had acted with poor judgment." A third finger. "That resolved, he took the girl to the nearest hospital, reasonin' that it would be a good idea to keep her alive."

"In this case, he was correct."

"And finally..." the fourth finger went down. "He contacted me for further instructions."

"What about Francis?"

"Oh." The smile grew broader. "I guess I didn't make myself clear." Colonel Sweet leaned forward. "Mr. Francis has been eliminated. He's quite dead."

"...And then I killed Francis." Heidel motioned to the side yard. "He's buried out there, near where you put Gianetto."

"Why did you come back?" Woodfriend was controlling himself—but Jay could see that it was taking quite an effort. *He'd like to tear Heidel apart!* Jay realized, watching the older man's hands clench and unclench as he paced the room.

"Maybe I was just being stupid," Heidel shrugged. "But I had to meet you both face-to-face." His eyes caught Jay's and held them. "Explain what happened." A crooked smile crossed his lips. "It seemed the honorable thing to do."

Woodfriend stopped his pacing, looked at Heidel with sudden surprise. "After the training you've had at that school, you can still understand honor?"

Heidel nodded.

"It'd be a shame to kill you."

A wry nod from the big cadet. "I'd have to agree with that."

He's changed, Jay thought as he appraised his former friend. *He's harder, more sure of himself.*

"If you were a Garou of the tribes, I'd challenge you to a fight to the death for what you did to Anitra."

Jay could see her in his mind's eye, lying on a hospital bed. *Dark eyes, full of pain...*

"But you're not of the tribes, you're not even an adult." Thomas turned away and went back to his pacing. "You're just a lost cub. And so was your bloodthirsty friend...."

"Francis was never my friend." Heidel's tone was low but firm. Unshakable. "He was with me because Colonel Sweet ordered both of us on this hunt."

The healer nodded at his words. "That just proves again that Jay was truthful in what he told us." Thomas turned toward Heidel. "Colonel Sweet and this school of his *must* be destroyed." He looked at the seated boy, weighing what he had said. "You, however, seem to understand honor." He squatted down in front of the couch, looked deep into Heidel's eyes. "You don't have to die with the others. Stay with us. Rejoin the tribes."

"I'd like to." Heidel's eyes dropped away from the healer's stare. "But I can't." He turned to Jay. "I gave my word to Colonel Sweet, told him I'd come back to the school." He seemed to plead for understanding. "I can't break that oath."

Jay looked into Heidel's blue eyes, but in his mind he saw only Anitra's pain-filled black ones. *Hurt. So hurt.*

"So be it." Woodfriend stood. "There is only one other possibility." He motioned Jay to stand next to him. "You say that you had no part in hurting my daughter. You say you did all you could to save her

life." The healer nodded. "I believe you. However, I also believe that if you continue on your present path, more people—more innocents—will be hurt." He stared at Heidel. "You are a powerful Garou, Arthur Heidel. You must choose between the path of Gaia and the path of the Wyrn. No one else can make this choice for you."

Heidel's eyes fell; Jay could see the pain in his face. "I can't..."

"You speak of honor. I have my own to consider—I *must* have satisfaction for what you and your kind did to my daughter." He turned to Jay. "But rather than kill you, I will give you a chance for life."

Suddenly Jay understood where this was leading. *Oh God, no!*

"I will let Uktena decide the proper punishment." He held his hand out. "Jay, your staff."

Jay picked up the staff of Dancing Star, held it out. *Don't let this happen!* But it was already too late. Jay could see the sigils glowing with power, ready for whatever Woodfriend had in mind.

"I give you a choice. There is one path that will allow all of us to leave this place with honor intact." Thomas held up open hands as he nodded toward Jay and the staff. "Grasp the Staff of Dancing Star and Uktena will decide what is proper."

Heidel stood up. "That's all?" His eyes turned to Jay, searching for answers. "You just want me to touch this stick?"

"There is more to this world than the surface reality of the Wyrmbrothers, Mr. Heidel." Woodfriend again indicated the staff. "Think of that as you grasp the staff."

Heidel reached out with head held high, face set and ready for anything—and closed his right hand around the staff.

There was a flash of light. Jay felt a sudden furious energy pass through his hands—and Heidel started screaming.

Ah, Art. Jay was filled with a great sense of regret. *Why did they have to send you?* The room filled with the smell of burning flesh. Heidel tried to shift shapes, go to Crinos, to Lupus, but whichever shape he took, the tip of the staff stayed welded to his hand.

Jay turned to Woodfriend. "How long are you going to let this go on?"

The healer's eyes were hard. "Uktena will stop when that one understands the pain my daughter will feel throughout the remainder of her life."

Another scream came from Heidel. His hand was shriveled now, black and charring. *Uktena*. Jay closed his eyes, concentrated. *This one has suffered enough*. He saw shapes dancing under his eyelids—the shapes that decorated the staff. *End his agony*.

Black eyes flashed across his mind, questioning, in pain. *I promise on my honor that I will do all I can to help the girl forget.*

There was another flash of light and the power faded from under Jay's hands. *Thank you, Uktena!*

Jay opened his eyes just as Thomas stepped forward. His klaive flashed up—down. Heidel, back in Homid form, tumbled forward, unconscious.

"Uktena has spoken."

Thomas immediately knelt down beside the fallen man, grasped the stump of his arm and used his healing powers to restore Heidel's strength. The youngster groaned, slowly regaining consciousness as Woodfriend's touch healed him.

"It is done." The healer looked the crippled boy in the eye. "You will live," he said, indicating the stump, "but this will always remind you that you violated the Litany of the Garou."

Heidel nodded, nursing his injured arm. "Are..." He licked dry lips. "Are you satisfied, sir?"

Woodfriend nodded. "I am satisfied." He gave Heidel an appraising look. "But I would be happier if I could get you to reconsider your position."

Heidel shook his head. "No." He looked toward Jay. "And the next time I see you, Jay, I will have no choice but to kill you."

Jay's eyes went hard. "If you can."

Heidel turned away from his friend. "I'll return

to the school." He looked toward Woodfriend. "I guess you'll be going to see your daughter."

The healer nodded.

"Tell her..." Heidel hesitated. "Tell her that I'm sorry." The door closed behind him.

"A strong Garou." Woodfriend turned to Jay. "One that could be a force for Gaia." The healer sighed. "If he ever finds the true path."



"Oh, daddy!" Anitra sobbed when Thomas and Jay walked into the room. "I was so frightened."

"I know, sweetheart." The healer touched his daughter's bandaged arm. "I... I wish there was something..."

The girl rubbed at her eyes. "I know..." She forced a smile. "I know there's nothing you can do."

Woodfriend's face tightened. "If only you were Garou."

"But I'm not." She was in control now. "And none of this is your fault."

"No." Jay struck the wall with his fist. "It's mine."

Woodfriend turned, startled by the outburst. "Jay!"

"It's true, Thomas." Jay let his head touch the wall, emotion flooding through him. *Can't change—not here, not now.* "If I hadn't come to your

door, those two would never have followed, and Anitra..." *Dark eyes. So beautiful. Filled with tears....*

"You can't blame yourself!" Anitra was sitting up in the bed now, eyes fiery. "You didn't hurt me!"

"I..." Jay couldn't face her; he turned away. "I could never hurt you."

"Jay..." There was still fire in her eyes, but it was softening as she spoke. "Come here."

He shuffled toward her, head down, afraid. "I'll leave. Go somewhere else." He looked at her, surprised at the depth of his emotion. "I couldn't bear it if you were ever hurt again."

"Don't say that!" Her conviction matched his. "I don't want you to leave!"

He looked up, surprised. "But..."

"Don't but me, Jason No-Name!" Her eyes shone. "You're going to stay with us—isn't he, Dad!"

Woodfriend nodded. "So it appears." The healer smiled. "At least, until he goes through his rite of passage."

"You hear that, Jay?"

"I heard it."

She smiled, wiping away the last of the tears. "Now come over here and give me a hug."

He did, his heart too full to speak.



"So." Colonel Sweet stared at the bedraggled young man in front of him. "You failed in your mission."

"Yes, sir." Heidel's posture belied his statement. He stood straight and tall, bandaged arm held stiffly at his side. "I guess I did."

"And got yourself beat up." The big officer gestured toward the bandage. "Pretty badly, from what I can see."

"Yes sir." A slight tremor was discernible in Heidel's words. "But I felt it was necessary."

"Necessary!" Sweet stepped forward, eyes boring deeply into the cadet. "Necessary to give them your hand?" His own silvery arm swept in front of Heidel's face. "Do you think I gave up my arm that easily?" The two big Garou were face to face now, eye to eye. "Do you?!"

"Sir." Heidel's eyes went agate hard. "I did *exactly* what you instructed me to do!"

"I instructed you?!" Sweet stalked away, fell into his seat. "Suppose you explain that to me."

"As you will, sir." Heidel's face was expressionless, tightly controlled. "If you'll recall our original orders, Cadet Francis and I were to track down and..." He hesitated, but only for the merest fraction of a second.

The kid's good. Sweet kept his own face blank and glaring. *I wonder if he's as smart as he thinks he is!*

"...eliminate Mr. Caldwell." His eyes flashed to

Sweet's face, catching the slight nod of agreement. "However, as an apparent afterthought, we were also instructed to avoid *any* contact with other Garou communities."

"Go on."

"Cadet Francis' refusal to withdraw upon discovering that our prey had made contact with outside Garou went against those orders."

Sweet nodded. "You should have backed off, called in for new instructions."

Heidel's face didn't change. "That *was* my intention; however, Cadet Francis did not see it the same way, and when the kinswoman appeared, he immediately attacked her." Heidel's eyes narrowed. "In my opinion, that was the worst possible form of contact."

"So you decided to offset it."

Heidel nodded. "If we were to avoid a feud, and a possible attack from the young woman's kin *and* their sept, I thought I had to."

Sweet nodded more openly now. "Go on."

"After I took the injured kin to the hospital and reported to you, I returned to the shack, reasoning that the Garou, whose scent Francis and I had already found, was bound to return sooner or later."

"With Mr. Caldwell."

A shrug this time. "That was certainly a possibility." Another momentary hesitation. "But I no longer planned to attack him."

"Why not?"

"Another attack would merely have exacerbated the situation."

Nice vocabulary! Internally, Sweet smiled. *I wonder if he learned that here?* "Go on."

"Within a day, the other Garou, accompanied by Mr. Caldwell, appeared."

"And?"

"I explained what had happened, informed them that I had already eliminated the person responsible for the attack, and offered to make whatever reparations they considered necessary."

"And they took your hand!"

"Not immediately." Heidel's eyes moved, but he avoided glancing at the bandaged member. "The older one, Woodfriend, wanted to challenge me."

"You didn't accept?"

Heidel shook his head. "It never got to the point of an actual challenge. Woodfriend called me a 'lost cub', which seemed to put me outside the bounds of their tribal codes." The boy looked quizzically at the big officer. "What did he mean by that?"

"I'll explain later." *After I have time to work out something that sounds right.* "For now, finish your report."

Heidel's eyes were rock-hard again, as if he would bore a hole in the wall over Sweet's head with his gaze. "Finally, he decided to leave punishment up to 'Uktena'..."

"One of the tribal totems." Sweet's face twisted. "Most Garou are pretty superstitious."

"Superstition." Heidel's arm twitched. "I'm not sure I'd put it that way." He caught himself, then continued. "He asked me to take Crinos form while Jay... Mr. Caldwell held up a staff he was carrying." He gestured with his left hand. "Wooden, about eight or nine feet long, with carving all over it."

Some sort of fetish. I wonder how Caldwell got it.

"I took the end of the thing in my right hand—and it got hot!" Heidel's face contorted with the memory. "So hot I couldn't let go." His bandaged right arm rose, just a little. "I tried to change shapes, but it seemed to hang on to me, burning my hand ..."

Colonel Sweet stood up, took one quick step to Heidel's side. "It's all right." He put an arm around the other's shoulders. "You did the right thing."

"Yes." Heidel's eyes were full of remembered pain. "I know I did."

"We'll get Dr. Caldwell to fix you up with one of these." The big Garou held his own mechanical arm up to the light. "You deserve it."

Heidel looked at the arm, a slight shudder passing through his frame. "If you say so, sir."



THE ORDEAL

"Why are we doing this?" Jay sat naked in the middle of a small tentlike building, sweat rolling down his body. "I'm burning up!"

"No, you're not." Woodfriend ladled more water onto the hot coals set in the very center of the building. "This is good for you! The more you sweat, the cleaner you become."

"That's not what the humans think!"

"You're not human." The healer took a deep breath of the new steam as it rose. "You're Garou—and Uktena!"

"All right." Jay sighed. He watched as a bead of sweat rolled down his nose, dropped onto his chest. "Any word on when this 'rite of passage' will start?"

"Soon." Woodfriend allowed more water to fall onto the coals. "When the moon is right."

"I'm glad." Jay leaned back, allowing the sweat to pour off his hair. "Seems like such a waste of time. After all, I'm not a 'cub', am I?"

"You are as far as our elders and those of the other tribes are concerned." The healer looked at Jay, held his eyes. "If you truly want to follow the path Dancing Star has laid out for you, you must become an adult, form a pack of your own, gain renown among the Garou." He shrugged. "Then they may disregard your scent and follow you against this 'Caldwell' person."

"All right," Jay held an arm up to forestall any more conversation. "I get the picture."

"Good." The older man sat back, breathed in deeply to allow the steam to fill and clean his lungs. "It is important that you do the best that you can."

The younger man wiped at his dripping forehead. "Do you know who the other cubs will be?"

Woodfriend shrugged. "I have no idea. They may not even be of the Uktena."

"Who then?"

"Members of many tribes, gathered for this occasion." He looked at Jay's dripping form. "I can tell you no more." He ladled more water out, watched the steam grow thicker. "For now, keep silent. Purify your thoughts as the steam cleanses

your body. Make yourself ready for the ordeal ahead."

Ordeal! Jay shivered internally as he considered the word. *Is it worth it?* He glanced at Woodfriend. *Do I really need these people?* He closed his eyes, again saw that huge tank in the basement of the school, the face of the woman floating in it. *Can I free her without them?* He shook his head. *No. Not a chance.* He forced himself to relax. *I need help. People I can trust.* He thought of Heidel turning his back, returning to the school. He glanced again at Woodfriend.

I need family....



"Atten..." All over the quadrangle, feet quivered as the student body prepared for the new semester. "...Shun!" There was a perceptible *THUMP!* as two hundred pairs of bootheels snapped together.

John Torrico, acting Cadet Commander, turned and saluted the hulking form of Colonel Sweet "All present or accounted for, sir!"

There was a flash of silver as the big officer returned the salute. "Thank you, Mr. Torrico." He nodded toward the troops. "Please rejoin your company."

Torrico did a smart about-face and moved to the front of the student body.

Sweet paused, his eyes roving over the fresh faces waiting for him to speak. *Less than five percent of them are Garou*, he thought. *One out of twenty*. He nodded his head infinitesimally. *Lost cubs located by our agents among the humans*. Then he thought of Jay. *Will they be enough if that boy raises the tribes against us?*

It will have to be. He allowed himself a tiny shrug of the shoulders. *At least until our breeding program gets under way*. Then...

He cleared his throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen." He held his face still, careful to show no emotion. "While you were away, celebratin' the holidays, there was an..." He hesitated for effect. "...unfortunate incident here at the school." He had their attention now. "You will all remember Cadet Caldwell—and the minor mental breakdown he suffered durin' the Marietta Marathon."

Heads nodded.

"His father, Dr. Caldwell, decided to treat him here, keepin' him close to home." Another carefully calculated hesitation. "That proved to be a mistake. Cadet Caldwell suffered a full-blown psychotic episode," again Sweet looked over the faces arrayed before him, "and killed two of our number."

A gasp rose from the cadets. Sweet could see

heads move as troops tried to see who was missing from their formation.

"Cadets Gianetto and Francis were laid to rest with full military honors." Sweet's expression was grave. "I will arrange transportation to their grave site for anyone who wishes to pay their respects."

There was a moment of silence, then:

"Sir!"

Sweet looked to the senior side of the formation. *Good timing.* "Cadet Marmor. You have a question?"

"Yes sir." At six feet two, Mark Marmor was one of the biggest cadets in the Corps: three hundred and fifty pounds of bone, muscle, and unremovable fat. If Heidel had the makings of a star running back, Marmor was the lineman to block for him.

But that was in the outside world, where there were other teams to play for. Here there was only one—Colonel Sweet's *special* team—and Marmor was one of their number. "What happened to Cadet Caldwell?"

"A good question," Sweet nodded, his eyes roving, watching the cadets, to judge their reactions. "He ran into the woods and disappeared." His keen ears caught several gasps, a whispered curse. *As planned.* "There have been several search parties—none successful."

"Then he could still be around here somewhere?"

"That's always possible." Sweet looked determined. "And if he is here, we *will* find him."

There was a mutter among the normal students. Sweet could smell the stink as their fear manifested itself. *Yuppie puppies!* He bit down the thought, kept his face neutral. "I will ask you all to be vigilant. If you see Cadet Caldwell, report to me or one of the other officers immediately." He swept the formation with his eyes. "I can't stress the importance of this enough. Do not attempt to converse with Cadet Caldwell; he is *dangerous!*"

The Colonel took a breath. "Now, before I dismiss you to your classes, there is one other bit of business you must be made aware of." He gestured. "With Cadet Francis gone, it is necessary to appoint a new Cadet Captain." He looked over the students, weighing their response. *They don't really care—I've given them too much to think about.* He smiled inwardly. *Good!*

"Normally," he continued, "such an appointment would go to a senior." A few heads nodded. "But with the school year half over, Dr. Caldwell and I have decided that a junior would be a better choice. That way he could serve the remainder of this year and all of the next." There were sounds of muted protest. *Nothing we can't handle.*

"And so," Sweet turned and motioned toward the form standing in the shadows of the office building, "it is my pleasure to introduce your new captain."

The figure marched into the light and braced to attention in front of the Colonel. There was a flash as a silvery hand lifted in salute. "Ladies and Gentlemen, Cadet Captain Heidel." The Colonel's own mechanical appendage caught the light as he returned the salute.



Jay felt his skin tingle as the howl reverberated through the air. *Don't do anything stupid, now.* He hurried forward, dodging between the trees and shrubs. *Wouldn't want to disappoint Thomas.*

There was a movement to his right. Jay risked a quick glance—*another Garou*—then turned his eyes back to the path ahead. *Don't want to step into the bog.*

Another howl filled his ears.

Not far ahead, he thought, speeding up a trifle. *Maybe half a mile.* His heart began to beat faster. *I've got to do this right. Too much depends on it.* Another Garou appeared, running close on his left.

He burst through a last bit of scrub, found his way barred by a high ridge of packed earth. *The bawn!* He vaulted over it, slowing as he beheld what lay beyond. Unlike the caern that Woodfriend had taken him to—*how long ago was that?*—this one lay open to the moon. Jay could see a dozen, maybe twenty Garou standing around a huge bonfire.

The howl came one last time. Jay could see that it was delivered by a tall Garou standing close to the fire. *Got to get there, answer the call.* Jay hurried toward the fire, reaching it at the same time as the other forms he had seen in the woods.

"Are all the cubs here?" The ritemaster was tall, even for a Garou, with a smooth coat of deep brown dappled with traces of gray. He glanced around, green eyes glowing as he waited for the response.

"We are here, Athro."

A low growl escaped Jay's lips. *How dare he answer for me!*

"Is some Cliath out of breath already?" The speaker, his nearly pure white pelt shining in the moonlight, turned toward Jay. "Perhaps this youngling isn't ready for the challenge?" The Garou lifted his snout. "And such a smell!"

Jay's growl became louder. He felt his claws flex as he walked toward the smiling Garou.

"Enough!" A smaller form thrust itself between Jay and his adversary. "Save it for our enemies."

"Sound advice." The ritemaster nodded as he faced the young Garou. "Especially for two who are as yet only Adren, students not yet graduated to adulthood."

Jay bowed his head. The elder was right. Now was not the time to fight. He caught a glimpse of the white-fur as he too bowed before authority. *Later.*

The ritemaster raised his arms, motioning the

young Garou to his side. "Come now, young ones, come and hear the task I have set for you."

Jay moved forward, as did both of the others. *Only three of us. Thomas' lessons came home to him. We are dying out. An involuntary growl came from his mouth as white-fur cut in front of him. Perhaps there will be only two when we return. He shook his head at the thought. No. That is the reason our race is dwindling—I mustn't think that way.* The other Garou stopped in his tracks, almost tripping Jay, who barely suppressed a challenging growl.

Control! he told himself. Make sure you always keep control.

"Come closer, children of Gaia." Jay and the others gathered in a tight circle around the ritemaster. Behind them, they could hear the other Garou gathering close, forming a second, larger circle. "To be accepted as full members of your tribes, you must prove yourselves worthy."

A keening hum sounded behind them, almost a song, with voices rising and falling in response to some unseen choirmaster.

"The Wyrn has made great inroads on Gaia in the southlands. Blight covers a land that was once green and peaceful." Glowing green eyes leveled on the three youthful Garou, weighing them. "Perhaps this is too big a task for such a small pack...."

"No!" The white-furred Garou cried out as the

ritemaster began to turn. "Nothing is too big for me!"

"Fool!" The ritemaster's teeth showed as he glared at the interruption. "Don't gainsay your elders!"

The white-fur bowed his head, although his body remained arrogantly straight.

Again the ritemaster turned away, ignoring the white-fur's lack of respect. "No, I do not think such as you will take the southlands back from the Wyrms." His eyes gleamed again—with mischief this time. "But there are other things that you can, perhaps, accomplish." He gestured. "Deep in the south, we have found evidence of a Wyrms caern, hidden within the blight." He looked at the anxiously attentive young Garou. "If you were to find such a place, there would be much renown..." The ritemaster smiled. "And none could deny your place in the tribe."

Jay nodded. *Dangerous, yet not impossible.* His mouth opened in a savage smile. *A good test!*

The ritemaster glanced at the three youngsters, who were clearly anxious to start. "I see you accept the challenge."

As one, they growled their agreement. Behind them, the keening grew louder, the melody more complex.

"So be it!" The ritemaster turned to another elderly Garou, standing away from the fire. "Open

a Moon Bridge, my friend, for those embarking on their rite of passage!"

The elder nodded, turning to the unseen totem at the heart of the caern. He began to hum, a tone lost in the cacophony of the greater keening.

Jay took a step forward as an opalescent globe appeared just over the ground, expanding quickly to the size of a baseball, then a basketball. Larger it grew, the size of a wolf, a man, a Garou—and still it grew, until it stood like the moon itself, giving off a soft glow that lit the faces of all in the gathering.

"Go now." The ritemaster motioned to the group. "Go in the name of Gaia."

As one, the young Garou leaped for the Moon Bridge, each anxious to be the first one through.



Jay landed hard, entangled with the white-furred Garou he'd had so much trouble with already. "Get off me, mongrel monkey!" He pushed Jay away, catching him off-guard.

Jay rolled as he hit the ground, came up in a fighting stance, teeth bared, claws out. "Who the hell do you think you are?!"

The white-fur stood up, brushing imaginary dust from his pelt. "I am Aaron First-born of Avram, steward of the Moon Lodge of the Silver Fangs."

Jay snarled, "Quite a mouthful. But I don't care if you *have* silver fangs!" He took a step forward. "Never push me again!"

The Silver Fang looked down his snout at Jay. "Don't dare talk to me that way! I am..."

A darker form, almost black, stepped between the two. "Uninformed, inbred, and much too arrogant."

Aaron sputtered, unable to believe what he had just heard. "You dare call me that? You? A feral mutt?"

Jay realized that a fight for primacy could destroy their quest before it started. *This is bad! We have to work together if we're going to survive!* He closed his mouth, masking his fangs as he struggled to control his anger. "We mustn't fight." He glared at the Silver Fang. "At least, not until we finish this rite."

Aaron, realizing that neither of his companions cared about his pedigree, bowed shallowly in Jay's direction, his dark eyes never losing sight of the other Garou. "As you say." Abruptly, he turned and began loping up the Moon Path. "Let us hurry, that the quest be over that much sooner."

"You gave him the leadership position." The black Garou straightened up, moved forward at Jay's side.

Jay shrugged. "It doesn't matter now." He looked

around. "What does matter is that we get to where we're going."

"Have you ever used a Moon Path before?"

Jay shook his head. "No, but Thomas, my teacher—Athro you'd say—gave me a pretty good idea of what to look for."

The other nodded. "And I'll bet you were born under the crescent moon."

"I don't really know." Jay looked down, noting the illumination of the path. "Although the elders of my tribe thought that might be the case."

"A Theurge—and Uktena too!"

Jay nodded silently.

"That should make things interesting." The dark figure smiled, fangs bared in a nonthreatening way. "I think you'd make a good friend." Her nostrils dilated. "Despite that odious smell!" She leaned toward him. "I am Eater-of-Bears, Ragabash of the Red Talons."

Jay looked at the other. "You're lupus."

"Do you have a problem with that?"

"No." Jay met the black eyes. "And I also think you'd make a good friend. I am Jay No-Name, Theurge of the Uktena."

Eater-of-Bears nodded. "Well met, Jay No-Name." Another smile. "Now I think we should catch up to our Silver Fang friend—before he takes all the glory for himself!"

Art Heidel loved the Umbra. For the bulk of his life he had been a skeptic, his father, a businessman, had taught him that there was nothing beyond the 'real' world. A world of profit and loss.. He'd accepted that as truth throughout his childhood and into his teenage years.

Until the night Colonel Sweet showed him that there was something more.

His first encounter with the Umbra had opened his eyes, shown him that the world wasn't black and white, that there was room for spirituality—and that there might well *be* a greater good. It made him more comfortable with the sacrifice he had been called upon to make—and less comfortable with his position at the school.

It also gave him an escape, a place where he would be free for a time of the burden of his responsibilities. The Colonel had shown him an area in the woods, nearly two miles from the school, where the Gauntlet was weak, allowing him to step into the Penumbra. This was impossible near the school; the boundary layer was too strong.

Heidel had wondered why this was the case, until, on his first solo foray into the Umbra, he had decided to find out. He'd followed his own trail back to the school—and was surprised at what he

saw. He'd learned that most things had counterparts in the Penumbra, gray reflections of their true selves.

The school's reflection was thinner than most, less substantial. *I guess it's too new for anything more*, Heidel told himself as he looked down on the site. He moved closer, investigating the shadows that clung to it. *That area there seems more solid*, he noted, moving forward. *I wonder why?*

Heidel walked past the barracks, through what he knew must be the Field House. *What is that?* The dark spot was just beyond the campus grounds. *It's right in the middle of the track!* Heidel slowed his approach. The black area wasn't large, but it seemed wrong, out of place. *I don't like the look of that. I wonder if the Colonel's seen it.* Heidel stopped, squinting toward the darkness. *Or the other guys...*

He took another step forward, grimacing as his foot touched a dark tendril. *This is wrong!* He backed off, looked at the spot, noted that it seemed to move, beating in a slow rhythm, like some diseased heart.

Then he looked at his hand, pulsing in sympathy with that rhythm, and suddenly became frightened. *What have they done to me?*

He knew he should leave the school, flee as Jay had done. He knew that Thomas and the tribes would take him in; the healer had made that clear enough.

But he had given his word... *It's all I really have that's mine.*

He didn't leave—and he didn't tell the Colonel about the festering sore on the edge of the campus. Instead, he spent more and more time in the Umbra, avoiding the school and his classmates.

But he never forgot what he had seen.



The Moon Path was like nothing Jay had ever seen before. It appeared to go on forever, glowing with a soft light that seemed to come from everywhere—and nowhere.

It's like moonlight, Jay realized, glancing up at the soft lunar globe hovering overhead. *Which is probably why they call it a Moon Path.* On each side, Jay could see vast acres of wooded plains. *Just like the Florida Panhandle.* Every now and then a ribbon of rock, twisted and tortured into an unnatural shape, would appear, pushing through a bleeding gouge in the land. *Those are the humans' roads!*

Eater-of-Bears loped alongside Jay, the two of them always a few paces behind Aaron First-Born, but careful to keep his white pelt in sight.

"This is not good," Eater-of-Bears growled after an hour. "We're going too fast."

Jay shrugged. "We cannot fulfill our quest until we reach the Southlands."

"The journey itself is part of the quest." The lupus inclined her head toward the landscape that surrounded them. "We may miss the forest as we search for a single tree."

Jay noted that Aaron had moved still farther ahead. The other's stance clearly showed that he perceived himself as the leader, scouting out the countryside for his faithful followers. "Aaron may be a little arrogant, but he seems to know what he's doing."

"That one?" Eater-of-Bears made a low noise in her throat. "He cares about nothing but himself!"

Suddenly, far ahead, Jay saw a bit of moonlight that seemed to be moving on its own, whirling around no visible axis. "Look at that!"

"It must be a Lune." Eater-of-Bears peered forward, slowed her pace. "I've never seen one before."

Jay also slowed. "Me neither," he muttered.

There was an aura around the Lune—a golden glow that was visible even in the pale lunar light. *Pretty!* Jay thought—but then the aura changed. *Look at that!* Dark rays of blue appeared, flowed through the gold, spread over it until the Lune glowed a bright, sky blue. *What next?* Then the gold appeared again....

Jay's eyes stayed glued upon the ever-changing spirit as he loped beside Eater-of-Bears. "Thomas told me that Lunes were usually friendly."

"Maybe." Eater-of-Bears was uneasy, especially when she saw that Aaron was slowing as he approached it. "But aren't they also known to be strongly affected by the moon?"

Jay tore his gaze away and glanced at the full moon above. "Yeah, and Thomas said that during the full moon..." He looked forward. The Silver Fang had almost reached the Lune. "I hope Aaron has enough sense to be careful."

What might have been a laugh came from Eater-of-Bears. "That one? Never!"

Jay nodded and sped to catch up with their so-called leader. *She's right! Aaron will never show any restraint.*

The white-furred Garou was just ahead now, standing directly in the path of the shimmering form of the Lune. As Jay approached, he saw the Silver Fang reach out, brush at the spirit. *No!*

A flash of light, not bright, but pervasive, filled their eyes, blinding them for a second, until...



"Where the hell are we?!" Aaron whirled around, his eyes flashing. "And where is that glowing bit of dung!" He turned the other way. "I'll rip him apart! Scatter his guts from one end of the Umbra to the other! I'll..."

Jay shook his head. *He still doesn't know what happened!*

They were still on a Moon Path, that much was clear by the glowing strip beneath them, but they were no longer surrounded by scrub brush and open countryside. Instead, the three Garou stood in the middle of a wide-open plain, with nothing around them except miles and miles of open land.

Land covered with long, spidery webs. *The mark of the Weaver*, Jay realized. All around, he saw the webbing, binding every inch of land in a static pattern. *I don't like the looks of this.*

"Jay No-Name." Eater-of-Bears was right beside him. "What has happened to us?"

Jay nodded toward the Silver Fang. "Aaron made that Lune we saw angry." He gestured around them. "In return, it sent us here—wherever here is."

"Can you figure out where we are?"

Jay stared at her. "Me?"

"Of course. You're the Theurge, aren't you?"

Jay shrugged. "I guess I am." *I hope I am!*

He reached for his pack and grabbed the staff of Dancing Star. *This better work, or we're all done...*

"What's that?"

"A powerful fetish of my tribe." Jay got a good grip on the staff, held it in front of him, studying the sigils. "One that I hope will help us here."

"Why would they give a cur like you anything?" Aaron's voice was pitched to carry.

"Listen to me, snowball." Eater-of-Bears' voice had become soft—and dangerous. "If you don't shut up and do as you're told, I'll throat your sorry butt here and now!"

The Silver Fang bristled. "As if a feral like you could!"

Eater-of-Bears growled low in her throat and took a step forward.

"No!" Jay stepped between the two. "No fighting!" He pointed at the wasteland around them. "We'll need all our strength to get out of here!"

Aaron turned toward Jay, his claws reaching for Jay's throat. "That's the second time..."

There was a burst of light from Jay's staff—followed by a muffled cry from the white-furred Garou.

"What happened?" Eater-of-Bears rubbed at her eyes, trying to clear her vision.

Jay stepped forward, brushing past the Silver Fang, who was suddenly nursing a singed hand. "Uktena doesn't think we should fight."



"Break it up!" Heidel snarled as he pulled two of Sweet's *specials* apart. "You're supposed to be learning *how* to fight." He stared the two seniors down. "Not trying to kill one another."

"He started it!"

Heidel backhanded the student, sending him skidding across the floor. "This isn't high school, Goldberg!" He glared down at the now-cowering student. "We're a pack—a team!" Heidel growled deep in his throat. "Never forget that again."

"Very good, Captain."

Heidel turned to see Colonel Sweet standing just inside the door. "I didn't know you were there, sir."

"I didn't mean that you should." The big officer motioned to the other members of the class. "Gentlemen, if you'll gather around...."

Heidel moved to the Colonel's side, curious as to what this unexpected visit meant.

Sweet nodded at Heidel, then waited as the small group of cadets in the big gym clustered around. When they were all within hearing range, the Colonel greeted them. "I have someone I want you to meet—someone who is going to be one of you."

Heidel turned toward the big man in surprise. The school year was almost over; why would someone transfer in now?

"The reason I'm introducing this cadet in person is quite simple." Sweet's gaze swept across the curious faces in front of him. "I don't want any misunderstandings about him—and I don't want you discussing his brother in front of him."

His brother? Heidel was more puzzled than ever. *Who could that be?*

Sweet's face broke into a wide grin. "Gentlemen, please welcome our newest member—Mr. Kevin Caldwell."

Caldwell! Heidel watched as a form moved out of the shadows of the gym entrance. *Jay didn't have a brother.* The big cadet saw the face come into the light—a face identical to Jay's, albeit a bit younger. *At least, I don't think he did.*



The little pack of cubs spent three days walking through the odd domain the Lune had transported them into. Three hard days traveling through lands overtaken by the Weaver, lands where Gaia had been completely tamed—forced into patterns of painful order. During those three days, Aaron's hand healed, but his animosity toward Jay and Eater-of-Bears did not change at all.

"Are you sure we're going in the right direction?" It was the fourth time the Silver Fang had asked that question since their midday break.

"As sure as I'm going to get." Jay held the staff aloft, allowing the others to see the glowing symbols on one side. "This is the way Uktena wants us to go—so this is the way we're going." He smiled at Aaron, baring all his teeth. "Would you like to hold the staff and see if I'm right?"

"No!" The other shied away, unconsciously shielding his still-sore hand. "You're the Theurge." He looked around. "But I wish we'd get out of this country. It feels..." Aaron shivered. "...wrong."

Jay nodded in agreement. "Yeah, I feel it too." He looked at the third member of their group. "How about you, Eater-of-Bears?"

"I have seen places like this before. They are umbral mirrors of lands where humans have tamed the Wyld, forced her to their will."

"Farmlands," Jay nodded. "Of course." He looked up to the horizon. "They seem to extend forever."

"Then find us a way out!" The Silver Fang growled in anger. "That's what you're here for, isn't it?"

Jay shrugged. "I don't know what I'm here for." He indicated the road ahead. "But I do know that I'm not going to question Uktena." Jay suddenly caught a glimpse of something from the corner of his eye. "There's something up there."

The others looked in the direction Jay was pointing, squinting in the gray haze.

"You're right," Eater-of-Bears nodded. "There is something there. Although I can't make out what it is."

"It's an enemy!" Aaron started to leap, fangs bared.

"Stop!" Almost without effort, Jay swung the

staff into Aaron's path. The white-furred Garou recoiled from the wooden rod, turned toward his companion with a snarl. "It might be another Lune," Jay pointed out, glaring at the Silver Fang. "Remember what happened last time."

"I can't see *what* it is." Eater-of-Bears peered forward. "But it's definitely coming our way."

"All right, Master Theurge." Aaron sketched a sarcastic bow. "What would you have us do? Shall we stand here and let whatever it is attack us?"

Jay glanced around at the Moon Path they were on. It was only about four feet wide, and there was no cover in sight. "What else *can* we do?" he shrugged. "At least there're three of us and only one of him."

"That makes me feel much better!" Aaron's fur bristled.

"It should," Eater-of-Bears spit the words out. "It *would* if you understood the power of the pack."

"Some pack!" Aaron snorted.

Jay shook his head, eyes fixed on the approaching figure. He could almost make out its shape now as it came closer.



Heidel paced the shadowy land beyond the Gauntlet. *I've got to think, got to work this out.* He strode over a silvery path, beneath a moon barely

on the wane. *That boy Sweet turned up with—he couldn't be Jay's brother!* Heidel shook his head. *Jay was an orphan! Didn't even know who his mother and father were.* The path turned, met another. Heidel paced along, not paying attention. *How could he have a brother? Another crossroads, another turn. It's impossible!*

Yet Heidel had seen the proof. *He looks just like Jay! Talks like him, too!* A right turn; the path grew brighter. *And yet, I know it wasn't Jay.* The fields on both sides of the path were smooth, regular in shape. *I'm sure of it!*

Heidel increased his stride. *The question is, what do I do about it?* There were webs on the straight rows of earth now, forming careful, geometrically perfect figures. *Do I break my word?* Another turn. The path was straight before him—as far as the eye could see. *Or do I leave—join those other Garou down on the Panhandle?*

Heidel shook his head. *I'll have to think about that option....* He looked up. *If I ever manage to find out where the hell I am!*



"It's a Bane!" Aaron's voice was filled with horror.

Jay stared. Thomas had told him of such things, but he'd never dreamed he'd see one so soon. The

thing was huge! Ten, twelve feet tall, with a body... Jay's eyes refused to stay fixed on the body. *It must have started as some kind of vegetation*, he thought, fighting to focus his mind, keep the fear at bay. *Maybe a tree, something like the big mangrove, only corrupted by the Wyrms...*

There was no doubt the thing had seen them. It was moving in their direction, unevenly placed eyes seemingly fixed directly on Jay. *It's the staff.* The thought came suddenly, but with the weight of truth. *It feels the power trapped in the fetish.* For the first time, Jay considered running—then realized that such a move would take him in the wrong direction. *Uktena led us this far.* Jay straightened his shoulders, fixed his eyes on the bane. *She won't desert us now!*

"What do we do?!" Eater-of-Bears stood to the right of Jay, her own wide eyes locked onto the oncoming abomination.

"We fight." Jay was amazed at how calm he sounded. "We didn't come here to run away."

Aaron moved to Jay's other side. "Maybe I misjudged you, No-Name." He grinned nervously. "At least you know how to pick a fight—and who to pick it with!"

Jay held his staff at the ready. All the sigils were glowing now, and Jay could feel power flowing under his fingers. "Maybe so, but the real question is—can we win this one?"

"We'll know soon enough." Eater-of-Bears pointed, teeth bared, claws ready. "Here it comes!"

The Bane's attack was sudden and devastating. With a burst of speed surprising for something so massive, the Bane flowed *around* the prepared defensive stance of the three Garou, attacking from an unexpected direction. The Bane raked at Aaron's unprotected flank with multiple limbs, each crowned by a number of thornlike claws.

Aaron screamed in pain and rage as he dropped to one knee, blood suddenly running freely, staining his no-longer-snowy coat.

Jay leaped over the fallen Garou, striking at the Bane's eyes with the weighted end of the staff. "Eater! See if you can get around behind!"

The Bane struck Jay's staff, the force of the blow almost knocking it from Jay's grip. "Thing's strong!" Jay panted.

"You hurt him!" Eater-of-Bears' voice was shrill with excitement. "Look!"

Sure enough, the Bane was backing slowly away from Jay, one arm fallen to its side. Jay took a step forward, staff ready, but before he could strike, the Bane turned away from him and raced to the other side of the path, slashing at Eater-of-Bears.

"Ugh!" The Red Talon fell back, her right hand clutching at a jagged wound.

"Get back!" Jay ran to stand between the wounded lupus and their enemy, staff spinning in defense. "Stay behind me!"

The Bane grinned, half its face opening to show what seemed like hundreds of sharply pointed teeth. "How long do you plan to protect them?"

"It can talk!" Aaron's voice was thick from shock and loss of blood.

The Bane's grin grew wider. "Yes, I talk. How long will you protect them," he thundered.

"Long after you're gone." Jay stood his ground, staff ready. "Wyrmtool!"

"We'll see about that!" There was another whirlwind of motion.

Jay struck out at the Bane, felt himself overbalance as he missed, then whirled, ready to defend if the thing tried to attack from behind.

But the Bane had other plans.

"Aargh!" Aaron's arm fell limp, the muscles and nerves sliced through. "Bastard!"

Again Jay leaped over the Silver Fang's form, again he confronted the Bane, struck at it with the staff.

"To slow, Wolf." The Bane rolled past him again, this time slashing out at Eater-of-Bears, who blocked the strike with her forearm.

"I kill them first." The grin filled Jay's vision. "Then you."

Jay struck out, all his strength and speed invested in one blow—and missed. He turned in time to see the Bane lash out at the helpless Aaron. "This one is almost done." The creature held its claws up, the blood dark in the grayish light. "Soon it will be your turn."

Jay waited, his mind suddenly calm, staff ready. He was determined not to let the Bane get past him this time. "Come and get me!"

"Soon enough." The Bane moved, feinting toward Eater-of-Bears, then pivoting and slashing at Aaron again. The Silver Fang screamed in helpless rage, then dropped to the ground, his strength gone.

"No fight left in that one." The Bane said as he winked at Jay, a hideous gesture that produced a scaly green protuberance. "Maybe I'll get the other one this time."

Jay tried a feint of his own, stepping to Eater-of-Bear's side, then pivoting back into the center, smashing upward with the butt of the staff. There was a familiar flash of light and heat.

"Uh!" The Bane fell back, half its face blackened, pointed teeth shattered and falling to the ground.

"Still some fight in *this* one!" Jay took a half step forward, swung the staff for another blow.

The Bane recoiled, snapping an arm out in a powerful block. Another flash of light, dimmer this time. Jay grunted, his arms aching with the force of the creature's parry.

"Enough play." The Bane glared at Jay now, one arm limp, its face a ruin. Jay could see green mucus drooling out of the damaged side of its mouth, running down its chest, dripping onto the Moon Path below. "Now I'll finish them." It grinned again, slime rolling down the front of its body. "Then I'll kill you slowly."

"Come and get me."

The Bane flashed forward.



Heidel turned another corner, saw more rows of carefully tamed, totally dead land. *Isn't there any way out of here?* He trudged on, eyes searching the landscape for any sign of change.

There was a flicker of movement, far ahead of him. *At last!* Heidel picked up his pace. *Maybe whoever it is can show me the way out of here!* He squinted at the horizon. *Even if he can't, I hope he's friendly!*



Jay was nearly exhausted. Blood from three or four wounds flowed down his body. None of them were deep enough to be really dangerous, but together they drained his strength, slowing him.

The Bane looked worse. One of its arms was unusable, and half its face was gone, burnt out by a lucky blow from the Staff of Dancing Star. Green liquid—*ichor*, Jay thought irrelevantly, *Lovecraft would have called it ichor*—dripped to form a slick pool beneath the wounded creature.

"How long before you fall down?" Despite its wounds, the Bane seemed unconcerned—and was as quick as ever. "Like them," it nodded toward the supine bodies of Aaron and Eater-of-Bears, lying unconscious on the pathway.

At least I hope they're unconscious—not dead. Jay readied himself for another attack. *It usually talks just before it charges,* he thought, flexing his fingers on the staff's hilt. *At least, it has so...*

The Bane leaped forward, its remaining arm raised, thorny claws glinting in the moonlight. *This is it!* Jay backstepped, bringing the staff down and around as he prepared to smash the back of the Bane's skull. *It's out of position!* he realized, putting weight on his back foot in preparation to strike. *I've got it!*

His foot slipped on a smear of dark green blood. Jay's balance failed him. For a split second, he

teetered, waving his arm, desperately trying to use the weight of the staff to regain his equilibrium—but it was not enough. He fell hard, his elbow smashing into the Moon Path, and lost his grip on the staff. It bounced out of reach.

“Experience a little fall?” The Bane towered over him, half-face grinning like some Halloween toy. “Too bad.” Its claws reached toward Jay’s face. He rolled away, throwing his forearm up to block the coming blow.

It never fell.

“I made you a promise.” The Bane’s grin was wider now, dripping more ichor on the streaming path. “Said I’d kill you last.” It turned away, headed for the helpless bodies of Aaron and Eater-of-Bears. “I always keep my promises.”

“No!” Fear surged through Jay. He felt the terror of seeing a friend killed and the horror of allowing it to happen. He leaped to his feet, determined to take some kind of action. His eyes searched desperately for the staff. *Over there!* He saw it on the far side of the Path. *Too far away to reach.* He’d have to attack with his claws and fangs. Jay’s mouth opened, a low growl of challenge issuing from his throat.

He leaped at the Bane.



Heidel topped a slight rise just in time to see a smallish, red-brown Garou leap at an attacking Bane. *What in all the hells is that?* Without thinking, he drew his klaive and ran forward, looking for an opening. *I should stay out of this,* he told himself, *get out of sight, let whatever is going to happen happen.* He grinned, fangs showing bright and ready. *That's what the Colonel would say.* He sprinted forward, klaive at the ready.



Jay felt his claws sink into the throat and face of the Bane. *Go for the eyes!* he told himself, lashing out with his rear legs, trying to gain some advantage.

It was no use. The huge monster tossed Jay away as if he were some annoying insect. "Not yet," it turned to grin at him. "First I kill *them*." He stepped toward Aaron, his claws ready for a final thrust. "This one is too easy."

Jay desperately tried to roll over, his feet slipping in the mixed red and green blood that lay slicked across the pale glow of the Moon Path. *I'm not going to make it!* New anger flooded through him. *Aaron's going to die!* His fury grew; red spots appeared at the edges of Jay's vision. *And it'll be my fault!* Jay felt a growl begin, deep in his throat. He made one last

effort to scramble forward, limbs flailing for purchase. *No!*

"Having some trouble?" The Bane was holding Aaron's head up now, studying the long slack neck. It grinned at Jay, pulling back, remaining teeth ready to bite into the helpless flesh.

And was rammed forward as another form leaped upon its back.

What the hell? Jay froze in place, unable to believe what was happening. Another Garou, this one big and dark, stood over the fallen form of the Bane, slashing at its flesh with a silver-edged klaive. Jay struggled to his feet just as the Bane whirled, striking out at this new tormentor.

"So," it hissed as it struck flesh and drew blood. "Another one." The Bane feinted to one side, then rushed its new opponent, ducking under a cut, raking at the fresh Garou with bloody claws. "You'll have to wait a little longer."

Jay limped to the side of the path, reached for the staff of Dancing Star.

"No!" A misshapen foot appeared out of nowhere, kicking the fetish out of reach.

Jay turned in time to see the Bane block another thrust by the big Garou, following the block with a slash that released a fountain of blood.

It's going to win! Jay looked toward the staff, realized that it was too far away. *It'll kill us all!* He

felt fear rush through him, urging him to run away. *No!* He pushed it down. *I won't leave them!* He leaped at the Bane's back, struck with his claws, probing for something vital.



Heidel backed away, clutching at the gaping wound in his stomach. *I'm not healing as fast as I should!* He looked at the monster still battling with the other Garou. *Something unnatural about the wounds...*

He saw the Bane grasp the attacking Garou by the leg and hurl him away. *There are wounds all over that thing! How can it still be so strong?*

Heidel shook his head, took a deep breath. *Just what did I get myself into?* He rushed in, thrusting for that one remaining eye with his klaive. *And how do I get myself out of it?*

Jay hit the ground hard; the breath rushed out of him. *Got to get up.* He rolled onto his hands and feet, pushing himself upright.

He staggered to his feet and turned to face the Bane just as it backhanded its new attacker, throwing him to the ground.

The creature turned, looking for Jay, a smile curling its ruined face as it caught sight of him.

"Good fight." It strode toward the fallen Eater-of-Bears. "Too bad you lose." It squatted down next to her and carefully, almost delicately, placed its claws on her belly. It began to rip slowly downward.

New blood began to flow.

Rage flooded through Jay, reddening his vision. He needed strength to defeat this thing that was threatening his companions. *Help me!* His mind howled. *Help me kill my enemies!*

As if in answer to his call, new power suddenly filled him, replacing thought and reason. Jay groaned as his body shuddered, bones and muscle gaining bulk, fangs lengthening, thickening...

Jay's brain whirled, trying to understand the changes in his body. but his new strength overpowered him, and his struggling reason disappeared into the primordial darkness of his subconscious.

The old Jay was gone. The new Jay flung himself at the Bane, long, saberlike teeth slavering as they prepared to dig into the enemy's throat.



Heidel, just struggling back to his feet, saw the change. He watched as the oddly altered Garou leaped onto the Bane, its weight driving the monster away from the bleeding form of one of

those who had fallen, fangs and claws ripping into membranous tissue.

The hulking Garou's hind claws were locked into the Bane's stomach, holding his body in place while steely front claws and foot-long fangs rent everything before him.

Then the Bane roared in anguish and anger, grabbing the Garou and forcing its mouth back.

Heidel staggered to his feet, glancing at the slowly closing wound in his belly. *I've got to help.* He picked up his klaive and started forward.

On the other side of the path, the creature that had been Jay kept fighting. He locked his neck muscles against the Bane's attack and fought to drive his teeth into the monster's neck. Neither combatant was thinking now. Their fight had become the simplest of contests: kill your opponent before he kills you.

And the Bane was winning.

Slowly, inch by inch, it pushed Jay's head back, his snapping fangs further and further away from the vital tissue that surrounded the base of the Bane's spine. His latest attack had opened gaping wounds all over the monster's body—wounds that were still spouting gouts of greenish slime—but the Bane's strength remained undiminished. Unstoppable.

Inexorably, it bent Jay backward. Ligaments tore

in the boy's struggling neck, spinal disks rubbing against one another. Jay panted, then roared against the growing pain, as he renewed the fight to sink his teeth into his prey's throat one more time.

The Bane grinned a broken-mouthed grin. It was almost over....

Then Heidel was there, driving his klaive deep into the Bane's spine, twisting the blade. The Bane screamed, releasing its grip on Jay, who instantly, instinctively, lunged forward and snapped his massive jaws around the creature's throat.

There was a liquid *crunch*—and the fight was over.

Heidel sank onto the path, holding fast to his ripped stomach, gritting his teeth against the pain. If the freakish Garou decided to attack him, he had no defense. No hope.

But the other figure didn't attack. Instead, it sat down a few feet from Heidel, staring at him with eyes that were bright and golden—then, as the big cadet watched, the figure began to change.

Into Jay.

"What the hell was that?" Heidel blurted as his friend collapsed to the path.

"I don't know," Jay sighed. He glanced down at his hands, normal size now—human hands. *Thomas told me about frenzy...* he furrowed his forehead. *Was that it?*

Jay tried to remember the details of the fight. *I saw the Bane getting ready to kill Eater-of-Bears. That made me angry; angrier than I've ever been before.* He remembered pain flooding through his body, remembered his teeth changing, his muscles growing, thickening...

And then it all went black. Jay took a deep breath. *Until I opened my eyes and saw Heidel...*

Heidel?

"What the hell are you doing here?"

The tall boy smiled. "I was taking a walk, trying to get away from the school." He looked at Jay, gesturing with his metallic hand. "Trying to think."

"Wyrmsign!" Eater-of-Bears had regained consciousness and was watching, still too weak to rise. "Who are you? How can you live with such an abomination," she gestured toward his hand, "as part of you!"

Heidel turned toward her, about to answer, when he heard Jay's whisper. "And whose side are you on now?"

He glanced at his erstwhile friend. *How do I answer that?* Heidel sat back, mind racing. *Do I even know?*



The grotesque mass that had been the Bane started to rot almost immediately, its body quickly

breaking down into a puddle of green liquid which, much more slowly, began to seep into the gray Umbral ground.

The smell, even in the spirit world, was unbearable.

Jay and Heidel, knowing that their exhausted group could not rest near such a stench, teamed up to carry Aaron, then Eater-of-Bears as far away from the site as they could. As they lifted the Red Talon, Jay saw Heidel turn away from the contempt in her flashing eyes. *What would she think of me, Art asked himself, if she knew what I did at the end of that fight?* His mouth pressed into a hard line. *Colonel Sweet told me I was a fomor—now I know that he was speaking the truth.*

Jay made sure his companions were settled comfortably, then motioned Heidel to join him a short distance away.

"Why are you here, Art?" Jay asked as the two sat down. "I thought you'd given up on hunting me down."

"I have." The big Garou carefully examined the open wound on his stomach. "I didn't have the slightest clue that you were out here in the Umbra." He looked up, his eyes steady as they fixed on his former friend. "As I said before, I was just trying to find a little peace to think," he gave him a curious look, "about the appearance of your brother!"

Jay looked up. "My brother?! I don't *have* a brother!"

"Yeah," Heidel nodded. "I know."

"Then why did you say..."

Heidel sighed. "A couple of days ago, when school started again..."

"School!" Jay snorted. "That place is no school!"

Heidel's eyes sparked with anger. "Do you want to hear this or not?"

"I'm sorry." Jay frowned with sudden foreboding. "Go on. Tell me about my supposed *brother*."



"Heidel is where?!"

"Near as I can determine..." Colonel Sweet's smile was entirely absent now. "He's gone into the Umbra."

"Oh. So he's *somewhere* in the Umbra." Dr. Caldwell smashed a fist into his desk. "Is that the best you can do?"

The big officer shrugged. "The Umbra is a big place; I can't just go in and *call* him."

"I *knew* we couldn't trust him!" Caldwell shook his head, then thrust a finger toward Sweet. "And *you* made me give him a new hand!"

The Colonel shrugged again. "I thought it would make him grateful to us. After all, it was our fault that he lost it!"

"It wasn't our fault!" The mage rose from his chair and began pacing the big office. "It was *his* fault! If he'd just done what he was supposed to..."

"Honor prevented..."

"Damn honor!" Caldwell whirled to face the Colonel, his face white with anger. "Honor means *nothing*! All that matters is who wins and who loses." The scientist's eyes burned into Sweet's. "I thought you understood that."

Sweet nodded. "I do, but..."

"There are no *buts*!" Another fist smashed against the desk. "We are here to win! And after all these failures, I'm beginning to think it was a mistake to leave you in charge of security."

The Colonel straightened. "No one else could do what I have done."

Caldwell returned to his chair, his expression suddenly thoughtful. "Perhaps not, but in light of this new..." he looked at Sweet, "...incident, I think I'll call in some outside help to look things over."

Colonel Sweet leaned forward. "Whom did you have in mind?"

The mage reached for his telephone. "I think our friends at Pentex might be able to suggest something."

Sweet's eyes turned hard. "If you let *them* in here, they'll steal all your secrets—the whole project."

"Perhaps." Caldwell touched a button on his

computer. "Perhaps not." He said, glaring deep into the big Garou officer's eyes. "That will depend on how good your security really is." A smile touched the mage's lips. "Won't it?"

From a desk-mounted speaker, Sweet heard a distant phone start to ring.



"...And then Colonel Sweet brought this kid out." Heidel's gaze was focused inward as he remembered. "He's a slightly younger version of you."

Is he really my brother? Jay couldn't help examining the idea. Did he use my mother? His mouth went dry. Or just some leftover cells... "Caldwell made another me..."

Heidel nodded. "If that's what you want to call it."

"What are you saying?" Eater-of-Bears had limped over, unnoticed by the two friends. "How could anyone duplicate Jay No-Name!"

"You saw..." Heidel caught himself, looking over at the still-unconscious form of Aaron. He lowered his voice. "You saw my hand." Heidel gestured with the silvery appendage. "The man who made this is capable of creating many other things."

"But why would they duplicate a Garou?" Eater-of-Bears' tone was puzzled. "They already have the

Banes, and the Black Spiral Dancers..." She shrugged. "What can Jay No-Name do that they can't?"

More than you know. The thought filled Jay with uncertainty. *Can I tell you without losing your friendship?* He turned away, stared into the gray nothingness of the Umbral sky. *Maybe I should just leave now, avoid hurting anyone else.* The image of his mother appeared, filling his mind. *But without the tribes, how do I save my mother?* Jay sighed and turned back to the others.

"Perhaps Caldwell doesn't have Banes and Black Spiral Dancers at his command." Jay looked at Heidel. "Maybe he's working alone."

"That would explain a lot." Heidel's mind began to race. "But that would mean that Colonel Sweet..."

"Is a renegade." Jay's eyes darkened. "A Garou who's turned against his own people."

"A Shadow Lord!" Eater-of-Bears growled the name out. "Some of that tribe have been known to turn to the Wyrms in their quest for power."

"What can we do about it?"

"Nothing—yet." Jay's eyes flashed. "Later, when we're adults..."

"Jay." Heidel's voice was low now, sincere. "There's something I have to show you."



BACK TO SCHOOL

Some hours later, the four young Garou stood on the edge of a Moon Path looking at the black spot that marked the Umbral site of Dr. Caldwell's laboratory.

"It's growing." Heidel stared at the dark shape. "Yesterday, it was barely the size of my fist."

"That is the way of the Wurm," said Eater-of-Bears glaring at the throbbing sore in Gaia's flesh. "He takes just a tiny bit of the land, then a bit more, growing, always growing..." She snarled. "Until there is nothing left!"

"I don't understand." Aaron was still shaky from his wounds, but he held himself straight, refusing to show weakness in front of a strange Garou. "How

could such a thing have been allowed to grow here?"

"It's our fault." Jay stared at the ruin of the land below. "We Garou are supposed to guard Gaia, but we spend all our time hiding from civilization, fighting among ourselves." He shook his head, gestured toward the ruined patch of earth. "And all the while, this cancer cuts deeper into the heart of our world." He turned to the others. "I swear in the name of Uktena," he began, as the staff glowed in his hands, "that I will fight such evil with every ounce of strength that is in me!"

Eater-of-Bears nodded, put her hand next to Jay's on the staff. "I also."

"Hell," Aaron declared, "I was born for that!"

Jay turned to the still form of Heidel. "And you, Art? What does your honor tell you to do now?"

Heidel didn't answer. Instead, he let his mind roam as he gazed over the horror that was Marietta Mil. He thought of Colonel Sweet, who had taught him about honor and what it was to be Garou. *Did he ever really care for me?* He remembered every word, every smile, every touch, gentle and rough. *Yes, I think he did.* Heidel turned his gaze out—to the open sore in the flesh of Gaia. *But does that mean I have to be a party to this... blasphemy?* Heidel's head shook slowly from side to side. *No!*

He turned to Jay. "I will join you as well," he said, "if you will have me, in spite of this."

Jay gestured to the staff. "Uktena will decide."

Heidel nodded, then, with a fatalistic shrug, reached out with his silvery appendage and gripped the staff that had so recently maimed him. "So be it."

The sigils glowed brightly, but no lightning flashed, no heat flowed. "Uktena has accepted you." Jay reached out, put his other hand on Heidel's shoulder. "As do I."

"I will follow the word of Uktena," Heidel declared softly, "even when my nature tells me otherwise...."

Aaron stood for a moment, unsure of what to do; then he nodded once, decisively. "If the others accept you..." His hand also touched Heidel's shoulder. "Then I will as well."

They stood as one, a new pack, born in battle, forged in the fight against Caldwell and the evil of the Wyrms.

Then they heard it....



The security expert sent by Pentex called himself Frawck. *Typical Black Spiral gibberish*, Sweet told himself as he led the creature through the halls of the School. *And why am I putting up with him?* The big Colonel shook his head. *Because I still need Caldwell to complete his experiments. Then...* He

glanced at the tall form walking beside him and allowed a tight smile to appear on his lips. *Then I can dispose of unwanted garbage whenever I please!*

"What kind of security is this?" Frawck gestured at the unguarded entrance to the school's administration building. "You're wide open to anyone who wants to attack through the Gauntlet!"

"No we're not." Colonel Sweet kept his tone mild—but his smile transformed itself into a glare that could cut through steel. "The boundary layer is so thick around the school that nobody can get through."

"Is that so?" The Black Spiral suddenly cut in front of the big officer, shouldering him out of the way. "Let's see, shall we?" Colonel Sweet gritted his teeth and followed. *Soon, I'll be rid of this clown. Soon...*

The Black Spiral strode to a doorway marked MEN, pushed the door wide open without a thought for who might be inside. "I assume there'll be a mirror in here?"

"All the rest rooms have mirrors."

"Good." Frawck stalked inside, letting the door swing back in the Colonel's face. Sweet grimaced and pushed his way into the little room.

The Black Spiral was already standing in front of the long mirror that hung over the sinks. "All right, let's see how thick this boundary layer *really* is."

"You doubt my word?" Sweet kept his tone mild, the threat low key.

"I doubt everybody's word." Frawck settled himself in front of the mirror, took a moment to center himself, then stepped sideways into the reflective surface.

And bounced right off.

"Whoa!" The Black Spiral tossed his head. "That's *some* boundary!" He took a step backward. "Better give it one more try, though."

Lead with your head this time! Sweet's mind filled with pictures of the mirror shattering, thousands of particles of slivered glass slicing through Frawck's helpless body....

It didn't happen. The Dancer again tried to step through the mirror, and, just as before, was unable to penetrate. "I guess you're right about the boundary layer here."

"Of course I'm right!"

The Black Spiral Dancer shrugged. "Too bad."

Sweet stared at him. "Why?"

Frawck turned toward the door, his toothy grin reflected back at the big officer. "Because the guys I sent to look around in the Umbra are gonna waste their time." He pushed the door open and strode out into the hall. "C'mon, show me the Field House and gym."

I'm going to kill him slowly... Sweet caught the

door before it could hit him in the face. Very slowly....



The howl shocked the little pack. It was not the sort of noise they had heard at the gathering. This was different, eerie.

Farabough used to make noises like that by squeaking the chalk on the blackboard. Jay's mouth hardened. *I always thought he did it on purpose.*

Suddenly, a second howl joined the first, then a third, a fourth. Each of them kept up a dissonant rhythm, the howls overlapping and blending with one another.

It was a symphony made in hell. It was...

"Black Spiral Dancers!" Eater-of-Bears' face was set. "I heard them call like that once before—when my father showed me the sugar fields down south."

"What are *they* doing here?" Aaron tested his muscles, tried to steady his step.

"Does it matter?" Jay turned in the direction of the sound, staff coming up in fighting position.

"They must be searching for me." Heidel took a step in the direction of the sound. "Maybe if I go back with them, they'll leave you alone."

"No." Jay's hand touched Heidel on the shoulder. "You're one of us now." He nodded toward the ruins

that were Marietta Mil. "You're not going back to that place."

"That's right," Eater-of-Bears nodded in agreement.

"Besides," Aaron was grinning now, "killing Spiral Dancers will bring us all added *renown*!"

"He *would* think of that!" Eater-of-Bears said.

"It's agreed, then." Jay ran his palms over the staff. "We'll stand here and fight."

"Fight!" Aaron showed strong fangs. "Hell, we'll kill the bastards!"

Heidel sighed and drew his klaive.



The Black Spiral Dancers that came down the Umbral trail were not what Jay would have expected from the stories. *I thought they were Garou, like us!* he thought, mouth agape at the sight that met his eyes. *But they're not. They're monsters!* There was a total of five, each of them tall but slender, with heads that seemed much too large for their bodies. *Like cartoon characters!*

One, walking just behind the leader, had enormous ears that stuck straight up and seemed to move from side to side. *Like a bat!* Another had legs that bent the wrong way. *Two sets of joints!* A third seemed almost to have wings, fleshlike sacks that hung from underneath its arms.

But the leader... *He's the worst of all!* The leader's face was totally malformed, the eyes stacked one on top of the other, rather than side-by-side. Jay squinted at the hideous mutation.

Just as they came into sight, the bat-eared one cried out and pointed to the spot the little pack had picked for their battle. *He must have heard our heartbeats!* Jay realized.

Then the howling started: an atonal call that was the Dancers' salute to their totem, Whippoorwill. As they called, the Dancers separated, each beginning its charge at the little group's hiding place from a different direction.

"Here they come!" Jay took a firm grip on his staff. "Get ready."

Behind him, Aaron began a chant of his own, calling on the totem of his tribe, Falcon, to observe his valor.

Heidel said not a word, just shifted his klaive from right hand to left, preferring to use the silver claws on his artificial hand for a weapon.

They were ready long before the first Dancer came into sight, baying his insane interpretation of a whippoorwill's song....



"What's this door over here?" Frawck gestured toward the back of the gym.

"Nothing you need to see."

The Dancer strode toward the opening. "I'll be the judge of that."

"I don't think so." Colonel Sweet's patience was exhausted. Frawck had spent the day demanding entry into every nook and cranny in the school. At first, the big officer had gone along with the other's curiosity—it's *what Caldwell wants, after all*—but the Dancer's demanding attitude had left a bad taste in the Colonel's mouth. Now, in the Field House, a place Sweet considered his own domain, he was not going to let the Pentex representative have his way.

Frawck turned at the Colonel's tone. "Trying to hide something, Sweetie?"

A low growl escaped Sweet's throat. "No." *Don't let him get to you!* "There's nothin' to hide." He gestured toward the door. "That doorway is an emergency exit from Dr. Caldwell's laboratory. It's locked from the other end."

"Interesting." The Dancer continued to walk toward the door. "Why would you have an exit here, in the gymnasium?" Frawck grinned, showing long, slightly pointed teeth. "Sweetie darling."

The Colonel's lips curled as he barely controlled the urge to bare his own teeth. "It was a question of construction." He took a long step past the Spiral Dancer, ready to block the other Garou's path if he kept going. "This was the easiest point

for a tunnel to reach." Another step. "And the most secure."

"Secure." Frawck stopped just short of the door. "In the building most likely to be crawling with sweet young humans?"

Sweet snorted. "And what possible difficulty could a few apes give us?"

Frawck offered a wide smile. "Why Sweetie, it would seem you have no respect for the people who pay your salary."

"Respect for apes?"

The Dancer's smile disappeared. "Humans run Pentex."

Sweet stepped between Frawck and the door. "And you respect *them*?"

The smile came back, wide and serene. "My dear, you must visit our headquarters compound one day." Frawck turned abruptly, began striding back toward the entry hall. "I think you'd find it quite... educational."



As the little pack concentrated on the Black Spiral Dancer approaching along the path, the other Dancers, attacked from the sides and rear.

Caught like children! Jay realized as he rushed to meet one of the attackers, the staff of Dancing Star glowing as it parried a slash.

Eater-of-Bears had ducked under the first of her opponent's attacks, coming up under the Dancer's stomach and slashing away. It was only as her claws penetrated that she realized her opponent had two heads—one in the normal place, the second in the middle of his chest—right where Eater's claws had penetrated. She saw an eye rip open, then rolled away as her attacker, seemingly unharmed, slashed at the back of her neck.

Aaron rushed at the leader of the band, anxious to earn the renown that meant so much to him. Within seconds, he was locked with the leader of the Spiral Dancers, yelling his battle cry as he fought for a claw or fang hold.

Heidel, on the other hand, fought silently and with deadly efficiency, slashing to the left and right with his two silvery weapons. He had positioned himself to guard the rear of the pack, and so found himself confronted by two enemies, each intent on getting past him to the others' unprotected backs.

For several minutes, the fight raged in the little opening on the Moon Path, neither side able to gain an advantage; then, Jay's foot skidded in a pool of blood left by one of the fighters. For a vital split second, he hovered off balance.

His opponent chose that instant to press his attack—and Jay found himself thrown to the ground, half pinned under the weight of the Black Spiral Dancer.

The hideous thing, long ears drooping like surreal pigtails, lunged forward, fangs reaching for Jay's unprotected neck.

It's no good! Jay thought, trying desperately to get the staff into position, knee his opponent—anything to get out from underneath. *He's got me!*

The Dancer grinned, pinning Jay's hands beneath its knees. It lifted its head, opening distended jaws wider still. Again a ululating cry filled the little clearing as it dedicated its kill.

Too soon.

A pure white form flashed across Jay's sight, hitting the Spiral Dancer full in the chest, throwing him off of Jay's prone figure.

Aaron! Jay realized, rolling out of the way of the battle. Then another form moved past Jay: the Spiral Dancer Aaron had been battling. *He must have broken away to help me!* Jay sprang to his feet, the staff of Dancing Star ready in his hands.

Jay moved forward, brought the weighted base of the staff down hard, smashing into the skull of the creature that was trying to attack Aaron from behind. Oozing brain matter, it turned toward Jay, lashing out with claws that seemed twice as long as Jay's. The boy ducked, then came back and smashed at the Dancer again, this time in the ribs.

His enemy tried to stand, staggering as bloody froth dribbled from its lips. Jay moved in, striking

again and again at the body of the Black Spiral. Smashing ribs, pulverizing an elbow joint.

Behind him, Aaron and the long-eared Dancer continued their battle, their growls and semiarticulate mutterings driving Jay to greater effort.

Finally, Jay's opponent, his chest and limbs shattered, collapsed to the ground. Jay stepped forward, any hesitation long since lost in the heat of battle, and brought the weighted end of the staff down hard, smashing through the Black Spiral Dancer's face, crashing into its brain. There was a flash as power flowed through Jay and his weapon.

His enemy spasmed once, then lay still, his brain literally baked in the bowl of his skull.

Jay leaned against his staff for a moment, fighting to regain breath. *I killed him. Just like that.* His mind froze. He took a deep breath, and hardened his heart. *He would have killed me! Or the others...* Jay took a look around. *The others!*

Jay turned toward Aaron's ongoing battle. The two Garou were still locked together, neither able to get a decisive grip on the other. At the moment, Aaron was on top, trying to gain some advantage, his claws ripping at the other's chest, his fangs reaching for its throat.

Jay watched for a moment, looking for an opening so he could drive his staff into the Dancer's face, finish the fight.

But the two opponents were too close to risk a blow.

There was a noise behind him. Jay whirled in time to see Heidel's klaive rip through the gray air, slicing cleanly through the neck of a Spiral Dancer. For a second, the Spiral Dancer tottered off balance, then it fell, its head rolling slowly away from its body.

Before the dead Dancer struck the ground, Heidel whirled in place, his silvery hand raking red trails through the chest of his second opponent. Jay could only stand there, watching in silent awe as Heidel exploded into concerted action, silver claws and silver klaive cutting away at his opponent. The Black Spiral Dancer, alone now, did not have the strength to face Heidel's furious assault. It struggled for a moment, then, realizing that it was doomed, turned to run.

Heidel's klaive slashed again, and the overmatched Black Spiral Dancer collapsed, its spine cut through. It twitched for a moment, then was still.

Jay shook his head. He had never seen anyone fight like that before. *He could have beaten me back at the shack*, Jay realized. *Why didn't he?*

But now was not the time to worry about such questions. There were still two enemies left to fight. Jay turned to the side, searching for Eater-of-

Bears—and found her fastidiously cleansing herself of the drying blood of her opponent.

Four down, Jay realized, turning back to Aaron. The Silver Fang had finally gotten on top of his opponent. As Jay watched, he pinned the other Garou's arms under his knees and, in a movement almost too swift to see, tore the Spiral Dancer's throat out with one sweep of his fangs.

As his enemy shuddered into death beneath him, Aaron leaped to his feet and turned, eyes searching for another opponent.

And finding only the faces of his packmates.

"Not bad." Heidel buffed his klaive against the fur of one of the Black Spiral Dancers, carefully removing any blood.

"You saved my butt." Jay moved forward, extending a hand to the white-furred Garou. "I owe you."

"As I owed you for the Bane." Aaron turned away, ignoring Jay's offered hand. "Just make sure that the elders know of *all* we have done."

Jay nodded. "I will."

"What were they doing here?" Eater-of-Bears indicated the bodies of their opponents. "This couldn't have been a coincidence."

"As I said, I think they must have been looking for me." Heidel slid the klaive back into its sheath. "Colonel Sweet could have sent them to find me."

"No." Jay shook his head firmly. "There were never any of these things at the school. My fath... Dr. Caldwell would never have allowed them in."

Heidel nodded. "You're right. Colonel Sweet hates them too."

Eater-of-Bears gestured to the bodies again. "Then what were they doing here?"

Jay shrugged. "I don't know." He smiled. "Does it matter?"

"It might." Heidel began to look through the packs two of the Dancers were wearing on their backs. "There may be others around, waiting for these to report back."

Jay nodded slowly. "You're right." He ran his eyes over the horizon. "We'd better keep our eyes open."

"Look!" Heidel pulled a wallet out of the pack. "This one has ID!" He pulled out a laminated card. "Says his name is Les Solow, and he works for a company called Pentex...."

"Pentex!" Eater-of-Bears rushed forward to see the card. "Here?"

"What's Pentex?" Jay asked.

"Pentex is what the humans call a conglomerate." Eater-of-Bears stumbled over the pronunciation. "They control a lot of other companies—including the sugar factories that are destroying the Everglades."

"Not just there." Aaron nodded at the card. "My

teacher says that Pentex is everywhere, serving the purposes of the Wyrms in many different ways."

"But why are they here?" Jay shook his head. "I never heard my fath... Dr. Caldwell mention them."

"Who knows." Eater-of-Bears threw down the card as if it would infect her with some disease. "But you can be sure that where Pentex goes, the Wyrms follow."



"So, Dr. Caldwell." Frawck leaned back in the seat usually reserved for Colonel Sweet. "As you requested, I've examined the security around here"—he glanced at the big officer standing behind the doctor's chair—"as thoroughly as possible in the little time I've had." The Black Spiral Dancer smiled, showing the pointed tips of his teeth. "Frankly, I find the arrangements quite laughable."

"In what way..." Dr. Caldwell paused to frown at Colonel Sweet as a low growl came from the big officer. The Colonel fell silent. "In what way is our security inadequate?"

"In all ways." The Dancer leaned forward. "This place is wide open. Any student can leave whenever he wants."

"It's supposed to be that way!" Colonel Sweet's glare was tangible. "This is a school!"

"Perhaps, Sweetie." Another low growl greeted the Dancer's mocking tone. "But we at Pentex prefer a much more..." He shrugged. "...confining environment for our experimental animals."

"I don't think that would work here." Dr. Caldwell leaned back, keeping his seat squarely between Sweet and the Spiral Dancer. "To continue our recruitment, we need to give the appearance of perfect normalcy."

"Perhaps." Frawck rubbed his rather protuberant chin. "But if your two missing pupils reach the Garou community, the question of recruitment becomes moot, does it not?"

"Heidel won't go to the other Garou." Sweet leaned forward.

"Ah, you're sure of that, Colonel Sweetie?"

Sweet grimaced at the Dancer's continued parody of his name, but nodded. "I'm sure."

"Well." Frawck stood up, head tilted. "I'm not—and neither are my associates at Pentex."

"Pentex's opinion means nothing here."

"On that..." The Spiral Dancer's smile turned cold. "You are quite wrong." He paced the little floor space behind the desk. "Pentex's opinion means everything—everywhere." He stopped in front of the office door. "As you are about to learn." He thrust the door open. Four heavily armed figures

stepped in, weapons sweeping to cover the scientist's desk.

D

"So what do we do now?" Jay gestured toward the steadily growing sore that marked the edge of Marietta Mil. "Do we go back to the caern and tell them what's going on here? Or do we finish our original quest?"

"What was that about, again?" Aaron's face was twisted into a grin.

Eater-of-Bears looked puzzled by the question. "Something about finding a Wyrms caern in the South."

"Well, what's that out there?" Aaron gestured toward the spreading blight on Gaia's flesh. "It's in the south, and if it's not a Wyrms caern, it's for damn sure an unknown Wyrms infestation."

"So," Jay smiled, "you think we should go back."

The white-furred Garou shrugged. "Why not?"

"I thought you were after *renown*!" Eater-of-Bears looked honestly surprised at Aaron's attitude.

"You mean the kind a Garou might gain by killing five Black Spiral Dancers?" The Silver Fang smiled. "Or destroying a Bane?"

Jay nodded. "I see...."

"Besides, we *have* to report this." Aaron motioned toward Marietta Mil. "If what you've told

us is true, that school is full of lost cubs." He nodded toward Heidel. "Some of whom, like Art, here, are already tainted by the Wyrms."

"The tribes will do anything to rescue *them*." Eater-of-Bears nodded as she considered. "Yes, that is the best path."

"So," Jay looked at his packmates. "We're agreed?"

"We go back now!" Aaron had already strapped on his pack and was prepared to take the lead.

"It seems the best way."

"So be it." Jay lifted the staff of Dancing Star. "We'll leave immediately."

"Wait!" Heidel was looking down the Moon Path. "Something's happening out there!"

Frawck grinned as the troops entered the big office. "You must think that Pentex is stupid!" His smile widened as he looked at the tense form of the Colonel. "And don't you be getting any ideas, Sweetie, darling!" He gestured at the weapons the troops carried. "We *always* use silver bullets."

Colonel Sweet's face curled into a snarl, but he held his ground.

Dr. Caldwell calmly sat back in his seat. "This is stupid. Pentex has nothing to gain by taking over

here! The bulk of the students aren't even Garou, they're the children of prominent..."

The Spiral Dancer leaned forward, knitting his hands together. "Apes. Nothing more, nothing less." He sighed. "Pentex isn't the slightest bit concerned about them."

"But if they call their parents, complain..."

"All the telephones have been..." Frawck's grin widened. "*Temporarily* disconnected, and accidents at poorly supervised schools..." Frawck turned toward Caldwell, his face an ingenuous mask, "...are certainly not unknown."

"Why *do* this?" Dr. Caldwell's calm was broken now, shattered by Frawck's matter-of-fact attitude. "I've shared all my results with Pentex, exactly as promised."

"Have you indeed, Dr. Caldwell?" Frawck sank back into his seat, two of his troops immediately moving next to him, weapons trained on Caldwell and Sweet. "My superiors at Pentex don't think so." He leaned forward. "They're especially curious about the secret lab you have down below." He grinned at the Colonel. "The one that you enter through the Field House."

"There's nothing there you can use!"

"That's not my concern." Frawck studied his fingernails. "I'm just here to restructure the school's security, make sure no more of the..." He raised his

head, eyes glaring at Colonel Sweet. "...subjects have the opportunity to run away."

His face softened. "Then I'm going to let you both get back to your work." He spread his hands. "Right after you give me a copy of all your papers and results." He smiled. "My superiors will decide what they can, and cannot, use."

"All right," Caldwell nodded, his face showing nothing but defeat. "We'll do as you say."

"Excellent!" Frawck stood up, hands moving as he directed his troops. "I'll want to see that secret lab of yours right away, but first I have to see what happened to my scouting party out in the Umbra." He stopped at the door and looked back. "It seems they haven't reported in as they were instructed to do."

The door closed, one of the two remaining troops remaining to stand guard.

Caldwell turned his chair so he could look at Colonel Sweet. "You expected this, didn't you."

The big officer nodded. "Or somethin' like it."

"Those soldiers." The scientist motioned with his shoulder. "What are they?"

"Fomori." The Colonel snarled the word. "Humans corrupted by the Wyrms so they can be used as shock troops." He snorted. "The same kind of thing you've been working on down below."

"I've corrupted nothing!"

The Colonel leaned forward, teeth clenched. "What about Jay and Kevin? I *know* where they came from!"

"That wasn't a corruption." The scientist shook his head. "It was an improvement, a recombining of some of the best features of..."

"It's not natural—that makes it Wyrms fodder."

Caldwell sighed. "Perhaps you're right." He looked up at the tense form of the other man. "I never knew you cared so much about it." He shrugged. "But it doesn't really matter if we can't rid ourselves of this new problem."

Sweet smiled. "Leave that to me. I've spent the last few months preparin' for this kind of thing."

"Your specials?"

The big officer nodded. "When the time is right, we will act."

"Good," the scientist said. He leaned back in his chair, turning it to face the fomori troops. "Very good."



"Are you sure they didn't see us?" Eater-of-Bears kept sniffing over her shoulder, searching for anything that might be behind her.

"I don't know." Jay kept moving forward, watching the staff for any sign that he had taken the wrong path. "Our best bet is to keep moving."

"We should fight," Aaron snarled as he glanced behind him. "Kill the gibbering sons-of-bitches!"

"There were too many." Heidel's voice was level, assured. "At least ten of them."

"That would just add to our *renown*!"

"*Renown* doesn't do you any good..." Jay turned up a branching pathway as a sigil on the staff glowed briefly. "...if you're dead."

"Where are we going, anyway?" Aaron moved up behind Jay, staring at the path ahead.

"I don't know." Jay lifted the staff for a moment, indicating the glowing sigil. "I'm just following Uktena."

"The countryside is becoming more natural." Eater-of-Bears motioned at trees just ahead of them. "We're moving out of the tamed lands."

"Yeah, that does look promising." Jay looked around at the few plowed, geometrically perfect fields that still surrounded them. "But I've got a bad feeling."

"What is it about?" Heidel was beside him, checking the rear.

"I'm not sure," Jay sighed. "Probably nothing."

They turned a corner—and were immediately overwhelmed by dark figures.



"Friends of yours?" Frawck gestured at the four

unconscious figures his troops dragged into the gymnasium. "We found them hiding out in the Penumbra."

Colonel Sweet stepped forward, looked blankly at Jay. "Nope," he shrugged. "Never saw them before." He moved to Heidel, looked into the cadet's slack face. "They're pretty young." He looked up, meeting Frawck's calculating gaze. "Perhaps they're Garou cubs out on one of their rites of passage."

"With a metal hand?" Frawck held up the offending member. "Just like yours?"

"Dr. Caldwell's been conducting his experiments for years, sharing the results with Pentex." Sweet shrugged, indicating the unconscious form. "Maybe he's a test from another lab."

"Yessss," the Spiral Dancer rubbed at his chin as he studied the Colonel's face. "I suppose that is possible..." He came to a decision. "I'll have to check, of course." His smile returned. "Perhaps there's a security problem elsewhere...."

He motioned to one of the Dancers standing to the side with the troops. "While you're being so helpful..." The figure stepped forward. "Have you ever heard of a staff with some sort of burning powers?" The Dancer, face haggard with pain, held up a hand burned almost to the bone. "Crwal here tried to take it from one of those boys. You can see what happened."

"Some sort of fetish." Sweet kept his face blank. "The tribes have many of them."

"This one is awfully selective."

Sweet shrugged. "Where is it now?"

Frawck dismissed the injured Dancer. "Back on the Moon Path. I'll send someone with protective gear to get it later." The Black Spiral leader looked into the Colonel's eyes. "Unless you'd care to go after it?"

"Me?" The big officer shook his head. "I've only got one hand as it is. I certainly can't afford to lose another!" He gestured to the still-unconscious pack. "What are you goin' to do with them?"

"I think I'll let the specialists back at headquarters figure that out," Frawck said, motioning to his troops. "For the moment, however, I'll need a place to confine them."

"There's a storage room down that way." Sweet pointed to the rear corridor of the gym. "It locks from the outside." He shrugged. "There are no doors or windows."

"Sounds perfect." Frawck stepped forward. "Why don't you lead the way, Sweetie?"

Colonel Sweet nodded and turned to the long corridor. *I'll lead the way, you son of a bitch*, he thought. *And when this is over, I'll have your unclean heart on a platter!*

Wake up, boy! Jay stirred, moaned. *I said, wake up!* Jay forced his eyes open—and saw an old woman standing over him.

“Where am I?” Jay tried to rub the sleep from his eyes, but found he couldn’t move his hands. “What happened?”

You were ambushed! The old woman edged closer. *Taken like so many children.* She smiled, surprising Jay with a full mouth of white teeth. *Which, after all, is what you are.*

“Ambushed by who?”

The Black Spiral Dancers. She shook her head at his naiveté. *The ones you were trying to run away from.*

“So,” Jay considered. “They caught us and brought us... where?”

Look around, boy. Dancing Star opened her hands. *See for yourself.*

Jay turned from the old Theurge, looked at concrete walls, the low acoustic tile ceiling. “It looks like the school.”

Very good. The Uktena nodded. *It is the school.*

“Why did they bring us here?”

You’ll have the answer to that soon enough. Dancing Star stood, walked toward the far wall. *Just be careful of what you say.* She smiled at Jay. *The walls*

here have ears—and not all your enemies are what they appear to be.

“What do you mean by that?”

The Theurge stepped into the wall. *You’ll find out. Keep your head, boy. And be ready for anything....* She disappeared.

Jay stared at the wall. “Thanks.” He grimaced. “I think.”

“Jay?”

Jay was surprised to discover that his eyes were still closed. *A dream?* He sat up and looked around at the concrete walls, the locked door. *No, not a dream—a warning.* He saw Heidel leaning over him. *Got to warn Art!* Jay tried to speak. “Ar...r,” his mouth was too dry to pronounce the words. *They were fine in the dream!* He licked his lips, tried again. “Art, are the others all right?”

Heidel nodded, gesturing behind them. “They’re still out, but you...” Heidel’s brow wrinkled. “You were mumbling, gesturing.”

“Yes,” Jay nodded, sitting up. “I was having a dream. Talking to someone very special...” He locked gazes with Heidel. “Someone who wants us to be careful about what we say.” He gestured to the walls, touching his ear. “Very careful.”

Heidel nodded. “Right.” He mimicked Jay’s gesture. “Do you know where we are?”

Jay shook his head with exaggerated care. “No,

I've never been here before." Again he stared at Art. "None of us have."

The big cadet nodded again, slowly. "What do we do now?"

Jay shrugged. "What can we do?" He stood up. "We'll have to wait and see what they're going to do with us. I don't see what they could possibly want from us, though. After all, we were just going through our rite of passage."

"Right." Heidel stood too, looking toward the door. "Whatever you say."

"Let's check on the others." Jay turned to the other side of the room, heading for the still-motionless forms of Eater-of-Bears and Aaron.

First time I've seen him in human form, Jay thought, looking the boy over. *He's younger than I am! Fourteen, maybe fifteen.* Jay shook his head. *And look at that hair!* Aaron's long, golden locks spilled around his head on the concrete floor. *The kid wants to be a rebel—it's no wonder he's so headstrong!* There was a sound behind him. Jay turned to face the opening door.

Colonel Sweet walked in.



"Who the hell are you?" Jay's mouth curled in enmity.

Smart boy! Colonel Sweet's silvery arm shot out, swatting Jay on the side of the head, tumbling him toward the back of the room. "I ask the questions here!"

Jay rubbed at the trickle of blood running down his chin. "Our tribe knows where we are."

"I'm sure they do." Colonel Sweet sneered as he strode to the center of the room, allowing a pair of Frawck's guards to follow him. "And I'm sure you'll tell me what they'll do to me when they find out what I've been up to."

"They'll skin you alive, then..."

Sweet raised a hand. "Enough!" The two fomori behind him raised their weapons, training them on Jay and Heidel. "I need to know which of you was carryin' a staff out in the Umbra."

"Why?" Jay curled his lips in distaste. "Too lazy to make your own?"

Sweet cuffed Jay again. "Don't get smart with me, boy!" He motioned to the two fomori, who stepped forward and aimed their weapons down at the unconscious Garou at the back of the room. "Those weapons are loaded with silver bullets." He grinned at Jay. "I can snap my fingers and have them cut my feed bill!"

"No," Jay shook his head. "Don't do that." He stood up, but let his head droop a little. "The staff is mine."

"Good." The Colonel gestured with his hand again and the two guards stepped back. "I'm always glad to see cooperation." He waited until the guards were at the doorway. "Now come with me."

"Where to?"

Sweet smiled. "To get your staff." He gestured at the fomori. "It seems that every time one of our people touches it, nasty things happen."

Jay nodded. "I see."

"Don't get any ideas." He pointed to the two fomor guards, still standing just inside the room. "If you try anythin' at all, those two will kill your friends."

"Yeah." Jay glared at the big officer. "I get the picture."

Maybe not all of it. Sweet smiled as he escorted Jay down the hallway and out of the Field House. *But you will.* His smile grew wider. *And so will that stupid Spiral Dancer!*



"Okay, I think this is far enough." Colonel Sweet halted the little group. "We can step sideways here."

The four fomori immediately formed a circle, weapons at the ready.

"Are you sure this is the nearest place where we

can cross the boundary layer?" Crwal scratched at his burned hand. "I'd prefer to be closer to the school."

Sweet shook his head. "This is the nearest point from which the Gauntlet is accessible." He smiled at the Black Spiral Dancer. "What's wrong, are you afraid of one boy?"

Crwal snorted. "Not of the boy! Just that damn staff!"

"Don't worry." The big officer gestured to the other guards. "Three of us will go with him. I think that will be enough, don't you?"

"I suppose so." Crwal snarled at Jay, who was standing quietly beside the other Garou. "And if he tries to get funny..." The Spiral Dancer transformed his uninjured hand, showing his longer-than-average claws to the boy. "...I'll take care of him myself!"

"Good, Crwal." Colonel Sweet grinned at the gesticulating Black Spiral. "You stay near the boy, then. The rest of you," he gestured to the others, "spread out when we cross into the Umbra, and keep a close lookout around us."

As the others nodded, Colonel Sweet pulled a hand mirror out of his pack and passed it to Crwal. "Will you do the honors?"

The maimed Garou nodded, held the mirror up to catch the light, then tilted it until he had it just the way he wanted it. "Gather around!" he called,

then reached forward into the spirit world, and pulled. The others followed; suddenly all found themselves wrapped in the odd thickness of the Gauntlet, and then released into the Penumbra.

"Very nice." Colonel Sweet looked around and saw the tamed fields and Weaver's Web he was so used to. "Which way to the point at which you ambushed the cubs?"

"Over here." Crwal stuck the mirror into his belt. "Along the Moon Path."

The little party began to walk, Crwal in the lead, Jay just behind him, with Sweet and the other two Black Spiral Dancers bringing up the rear.

"Is it far?"

Crwal shrugged. "What is far in the spirit world?" He rounded a bend, strode up a little hill. "We will be there when we arrive."

Jay nodded. His own adventure in the Umbra had shown him that time operated differently here. He sneaked a glance at Colonel Sweet. The tall Garou was planning something, Jay was sure. *I just wish I knew what!*

They walked past the blighted spot that marked Dr. Caldwell's lab. *It's worse!* he thought, his eyes widening. *It must have doubled in size since we were here yesterday!* Jay shook his head. *How could I have lived there for so long?* He noticed Colonel Sweet staring at the same spot. *How could he?*

The two Spiral Dancer guards slipped away, taking side trails while Crwal kept pushing ahead on the main path. After a time, Jay thought he recognized the trail. *Just up that hill*, he thought. *There'll be a turn, then a flat area.* Crwal led them up, then turned to the right. *Just a little farther*, Jay realized.

Suddenly, they were in the opening. Crwal came to a stop and pointed to the far end of the path, where, alone and seemingly untouched, the staff of Dancing Star lay. "There it is."

"Nice work, Crwal." Colonel Sweet's smile was still wide, even in Crinos form. "I know how hard it can be to navigate in the Umbral regions."

The Black Spiral Dancer dipped his head at the praise. "I've always had a feel for such things."

"A good feel." The big officer moved forward, putting his arm on the other's shoulder. "I'll tell Frawck what a help you've been. But first," he said, turning toward Jay, "cub, I want you to pick up the staff. Remember what I said about the others. Don't do anythin' stupid."

Jay nodded, then moved forward. He could see the other two Spiral Dancers enter the clearing, their scouting complete. The staff lay just ahead. Jay reached down to pick it up...

And Colonel Sweet swept into action, his silvery claws ripping across Crwal's throat, almost tearing

the Spiral Dancer's head off. Jay saw the movement and responded, leaping forward with the staff extended, smashing its weighted end into the face of one of the surviving guards. He twisted it as it hit, and heard the bones crunch as the skin began to burn.

He pulled back, twirled the staff once, then extended his weight to the side, smashing the weapon into the head of the final guard. Bone shattered, and the surprised Spiral Dancer slipped to the ground, blood and brain matter pouring out of his shattered head.

"Not bad." Colonel Sweet said as he began to clean the gore off his metallic arm. "I guess you did learn a couple of things at the school."

Jay nodded. "Enough."

"No, not quite enough."

Both Garou jumped at the new voice.

"You should have learned more about trailcraft." Frawck shook his head as he surveyed the scene before him. "Then you'd have noticed that we came across before you did." Six other Black Spiral Dancers appeared, whispering their insane whippoorwill cry as they took position. Frawck grinned at Colonel Sweet. "I certainly expected more of you, Sweetie Darling." The grin disappeared. "But I always seem to be disappointed in love."

"Hey!" Jay twirled the staff, then pitched the thing toward Frawck, ready to follow it up with an attack when the Spiral Dancer began to burn.

"Very good!" Frawck sidestepped, watched the staff fall harmlessly to the ground. "But still not good enough." He made a motion to the other Spiral Dancers. "Detain them."



The storage room had upgraded to a jail now. Two TV cameras, each on a movable mount, had been placed in opposite corners of the little room, their positions designed to allow full, overlapping coverage of the Garou locked inside.

Jay's pack, oddly subdued, was sitting just below one of the cameras. *They have collars on!* Jay realized, his eyes widening. *But why? If they shift to Crinos, they'll just snap off...*

"I know what you're thinking." Frawck motioned to one of his fomori guards. "You're wondering why your friends don't rip their pretty new collars off." He smiled as the guard moved behind Jay. "There's a good reason for that. These collars..." He pulled one out of his pocket, handed it to the fomor, "...were developed by one of our South American subsidiaries." He pointed to the inside. "Each one has a tiny ring of sharpened silver inside," He said.

The guard pulled the collar around Jay's throat. "If you try to change into Crinos form while this is on..." Frawck ran a finger across his throat. "Well, it would be messy."

The fomor fastened the collar around Jay's throat, reached out a hand for a second one, and turned to Colonel Sweet.

"Incidentally," Sweet's voice was soft, controlled. "Just how did you know what I was up to?"

"Did you think I was stupid?" Frawck smiled as the guard set the collar on the Colonel. "I studied this place before I came here, went through all the paperwork you sent to Pentex." The smile widened. "There was a yearbook, with a very nice picture of young Jay...."

Realization hit Colonel Sweet. "That's right! A picture from last year's track meet..."

Frawck nodded. "And the other one—Heidel, I think his name is—his smiling face was there as well." The Spiral Dancer stroked his chin. "It made me wonder: why would Colonel Sweet, a responsible man, the man in charge of *all* Cadets, not recognize two of his best and brightest?" He looked at Sweet, head inclined slightly. "Especially when one has such a familiar-looking hand."

"Yes." The Colonel glared at the guard as he tightened the collar. "I can see where that might be a stumper."

"It finally dawned on me that you were attempting to deceive me." The guard finished his work and started for the door. "Pity, actually; we could have been great friends."

Sweet shrugged. "We might still."

"Oh no." Frawck let the guard past. "I seriously doubt that." He gripped the side of the door. "You see, there's really no time for our passion to grow." He smiled. "Tomorrow a helicopter will arrive to gather up your little lambs here and take them back to Pentex Headquarters for a proper interrogation." The smile turned predatory. "Afterward, well, I don't see any real reason to keep *you* around." Frawck raised an arm in a sweeping gesture. "I've discovered that I rather like it here, which is ideal, since I will certainly be named the new head of security." Overhead lights glinted off sharpened teeth. "Colonel Frawck. It has a certain ring to it, don't you think?"

"But we can discuss all that tomorrow just before we dispose of you!"

"Bastard!" Aaron's voice broke as he said it. The youngster looked embarrassed. He fingered the collar on his neck, pulling his long hair out from under it. "I'd like to get him alone for just a minute."

"He'd rip your throat out," Colonel Sweet said as he sat on the floor, resting his back against one of the walls. "That one is nobody's fool."

"What are we going to do?" Jay paced across the room, memories rolling through his mind. *Skylar is up there, and Martin, and Peevy...* Jay remembered the juniors, who were his friends. *They're good kids, just worried about grades and girls.* His face was grim. *They don't know about Pentex and Garou and Gaia...* "We can't let Pentex get control of all these kids!"

"What *can* we do?" Sweet gestured to the cameras, ran his finger in front of his mouth. "There's no way out of here."

Jay nodded, then sighed. "I guess you're right." He sat down and laid his head against the wall, falling into a light sleep.

Only moments after falling asleep Jay was startled awake by a vibration behind the wall. He glanced at the Colonel; the big man's metal hand was against the wall, strong fingers tapping the bricks. *So, that's his secret.* Jay let his head rest against the wall again, nodding quietly at the ready faces of Heidel, Aaron, and Eater-of-Bears. *Guess we'd better get some rest. I suspect we'll need it later.*



"So, Doctor." Frawck leaned back in the big chair opposite Caldwell's desk. "Now that the Security problem is resolved, perhaps you'll be kind enough to show me your laboratory."

The mage leaned back in his seat, measuring the

figure in front of him. "I'm not sure that would be a good idea."

The Spiral Dancer's grin widened, showing strong, pointed teeth. "I really must insist."

Caldwell raised an eyebrow. "Are you threatening me?"

"Call it what you wish," the slender figure said, leaning forward. "But you *will* show me the lab—one way or another."

"You know..." Caldwell ran his hands over his keyboard. "Colonel Sweet was always making veiled threats like that." The scientist smiled at the Dancer. "It must be some sort of genetic trait with the Garou, the result of having no natural enemies left." He touched one final key, smiled at the result that appeared on his console. "However, as I have always been in charge here, I resent such things."

"That's too bad, Doctor." Frawck held up a hand, squinting at his nails. "And I *will* try to avoid such demands in the future. For the moment, however..."

"Please." Caldwell raised a hand, palm forward. "No further threats. I really don't respond well to such things."

"Dr. Caldwell, my orders are very clear."

"Yes, I know." The mage glanced at his screen. "Strengthen security, find and detain any runaway subjects." He looked up at the Spiral Dancer. "And take all measures to discover the current state of Dr.

Caldwell's genetic experiments." He smiled. "Did I miss anything?"

"That was supposed to be coded material."

Caldwell's smile grew. "Coded from me? A Progenitor mage? Come now, you've shown that you're far more intelligent than that!"

Frawck nodded. "I see what you mean; still, I *do* have my orders."

"Yes, well," Caldwell said, his hand reaching for a switch. "I understand that. However..."

Frawck's chair suddenly folded around him, silvery bracing rods becoming visible as his body was enfolded in their embrace. "What...?!"

"Just a little something I had planned for Colonel Sweet." The mage's hands played over a group of switches. "I knew he'd eventually turn against me." He held his hand over one last switch. "A pity, really. I was rather looking forward to seeing his face when I did this."

"Caldwell! Wait!"

"No time." He pushed the switch. "No time at all."

A rod slammed down against Frawck's head.



Jay was awakened by a thump that bounced his head off the wall. *It's time!* He looked over at Colonel Sweet. The big man was also awake and

alert, eyes darting from the surveillance TV in the ceiling to the door. Jay rolled to the side, trying his best to look like someone in a troubled sleep. He bumped into Heidel's legs, tapped them with his fingers.

"Wha..." Heidel's eyes snapped open, but when he saw Jay's wink, he fell silent, although clearly alert and ready. Jay gave a minuscule nod. Heidel opened and closed his eyes once, signaling understanding, then turned away, *carelessly* bumping into the lupine form that was Eater-of-Bears. She too snapped awake, but did not betray herself.

We're as ready as we're going to get, Jay realized. Aaron will have to wait. The Silver Fang wouldn't be able to hold his tongue, Jay knew. Better to wake him when the action starts.

They didn't have long to wait. Within seconds, there was a cry outside the door, followed by a loud *thump!* Sweet sprang to his feet, followed, milliseconds later, by Jay, Heidel, and Eater-of-Bears. They all stood ready in an irregular circle until the door opened.

A Garou stood there, incongruously wearing a cadet hat.

Sweet rushed forward, catching the limp form the cadet was holding and quietly snapping its neck. "Time to move," he whispered. Jay took a

second to wake Aaron, holding a hand over his mouth to stifle any outcry. Moments later, all five were out of the storage room and heading toward the main gymnasium.

"We've got to get to the coach's office." Sweet took the lead. "There's a pair of bolt cutters there."

"Good idea." Jay ran his fingers inside the collar that still hugged his neck. "Then what?"

"Then you head back into the Umbra," Sweet smiled. "And my troops and I take the school back."

"Won't work." Jay shook his head.

"Why not?" They reached the coach's office, pushed through the door.

"Pentex won't leave you alone now." Jay opened the big metal closet on one side of the office. "They'll come back with more troops if you throw these out."

The Colonel was ransacking the desk. "What do you have in mind?"

Jay found the cutters, motioned Sweet to turn around. "Get the cubs out of here, take them back to the tribes." He clipped once and the collar fell away.

"Thanks." The Colonel held out his hand. "Your turn."

Jay passed the cutters over, held the collar away from his skin. "It's the only way."

"We'll see." Sweet snapped the second collar off. "It may not matter." He grinned at Jay. "We may all die."

Jay grinned back. "Somehow, I don't think so."



Frawck came awake to find himself still trapped in the collapsed chair. *Interesting trap*, he thought, trying to wriggle free from the silvery bars. He snarled as the bars clamped tighter, holding him fast. He thought about shifting to Crinos, then realized that the bars were arranged in such a way that they would cut him in half if he tried. He would have to call for help. *I hope to Whippoorwill there's a fomor outside, because if Pentex hears about this...* He called out.

There was no answer.

Shit! He gathered himself for another try. *I hope this room isn't soundproof!* He yelled again, grimacing as the sound bounced off the walls of the office. *Come on!*

The door opened, and a fomor guard rushed in. *Thank you!*

"Sir." The troop was short and squat, but, Frawck knew, had enhanced vision and strength. "What's wrong?" He raced to the Dancer leader's side.

"No questions," the slender Garou snapped, nodding toward Caldwell's desk. "There's a console

over there; see if you can find a way to disengage this chair."

"Right, sir." The guard moved to the scientist's chair, staring down at the controls. "There's a lot of stuff here...."

Frawck sighed. "Forget about the switches; look for a computer console."

The guard looked down. "There's a screen here, right in the middle of the desk."

"How about a keyboard? A mouse?"

A nod. "Both."

"Okay." Frawck thought for a moment. "Now, what's on the screen?"

"Nothing. It's blank."

Marvelous! "Try moving the mouse along the pad."

"Nothing happens."

"Hit *enter* on the keyboard."

"Oh!"

I don't like the sound of that. "What happened?"

The guard was backing away from the console. "There's a clock in the top right hand corner of the screen, and it's counting down."

"Get over here!" Frawck put all the strength of his Homid form into one more effort to move the bars.

Nothing happened.

"Grab the end of that bar." The guard took it in his right hand. "Use both hands!"

"But my gun..."

"Drop the gun!"

"They taught me never to..."

Frawck growled loudly, teeth gleaming in the bright overhead lighting. "Put the gun down now—and grab this bar."

"Yes sir." The gun *thumped* to the floor.

"Now, when I say pull, you give it all you've got." Frawck gathered himself for one last push. "Ready... PULL!"

The bar shifted, just a bit, but enough that Frawck could squirm under it, get his chest and head free. He instantly shifted to Crinos form and tore away the second bar pinning his legs.

The guard watched, open-mouthed.

"Don't just stand there." Frawck shook his head in frustration. "Sound the alarm! We've got to find Dr. Caldwell."

"Sir, we don't have an alarm..."

"Use the fire alarm, moron! And tell the guards to assemble in the quadrangle."

"The quadrangle..."

Frawck closed his eyes, drew in a breath. "It's the big open area between all the buildings."

"Oh."

"Don't just stand there gaping!" Frawck was almost frothing at the mouth now. "Do it!"

"Yes sir!" The fomor rushed away, dragging his gun behind him.

Frawck watched him go then leaped over the desk, dropping into Caldwell's seat, eyes searching the computer screens mounted there. One had a label—STERILIZATION TIMER—and a clock face that was moving backward. *I don't like the looks of this!* The Spiral Dancer touched the console in front of him, trying to decide the proper thing to do. *I don't like it at all!*



The alarm sounded just as Jay cut the last of the collars—this one from Aaron's neck.

"That's the fire alarm!" Heidel had to shout to make himself heard over the din.

"It's all they have." Colonel Sweet moved to the door and looked out to see what was happening. "I never installed any security alarms."

"Why not?" Jay moved to stand beside him.

"No reason to," Sweet shrugged. "There was nobody but me to alert."

"What do we do now?" Aaro said as he pushed his long blond hair out of his eyes.

Sweet pointed up the corridor, toward the gym. "My special students will be headin' for our assembly point; the human cadets will move to the quadrangle."

"We can't let them see us!" Jay could just imagine the newspaper headlines.

"Don't worry about that." Sweet's smile was as broad as ever. "They'll go into Delirium if they see Garou—it's the fomori I'm concerned about."

Aaron shifted into Crinos, headed out the door. "Enough talk! Let's get 'em!"

Heidel shrugged and joined him. "For once, I agree."

Colonel Sweet nodded, then changed into the biggest Crinos form Jay had ever seen. "I'll gather my troops," he barked, gesturing toward the quadrangle. "You keep them busy out there!"

Jay nodded, adding: "Don't take too long." He transformed into Crinos form and headed up the corridor.

The rest of the pack was waiting by the entrance to the quadrangle. "The cadets are coming out." Heidel pointed to a stream of figures, some dressed, some in bathrobes, all running into the central quadrangle. "Was Sweet right when he said they wouldn't actually see us?"

Eater-of-Bears, still careful to stay away from his artificial hand, nodded. "Yes. Humans are so locked into their 'rational' world that they can't believe we exist..."

Aaron broke in, "So they don't see us, or forget what they've seen."

"And the fomori?"

Aaron's mouth twitched into a grin. "We'll just have to kill them."

Jay nodded. *I guess that's the way it has to work.* He sighed. "Let's do it, then."



The fomori hadn't been briefed on what to do if someone set off an alarm. When it came, most of them were lying peacefully in bed, dreaming of tomorrow's stand-off.

Dowling was the fomori's squad leader. Once upon a time he'd been a happy careerist in the US Army, fed, boarded, and paid by a nation that seemed content to let him do just as he pleased—until an unfortunate (and fatal) incident in Korea dumped him into the real world, saddled with a dishonorable discharge and a taste for violence.

His future looked bleak—at best, a lifetime on the dole, with the occasional bar fight to keep him from withering away—until he found Pentex Inc. *It was better than the Army.* In Pentex, they actually *wanted* him to fight, paid him *extra* to hurt people. It was a dream come true, and the 'enhancements' they insisted upon were a small price to pay for that dream—even if the operations left him with a body armored like a bug and no sex life to speak of.

"Everybody up!" The alarm was still ringing away. "Lock and load! We got problems!"

"C'mon, Dowling, it's just a fire alarm." Sudano

rolled over, tried to pull the pillow over his unnaturally enlarged head. "Let us sleep!"

The big sergeant kicked at the bottom of Sudano's bed with his armored foot, popping it up into the air, dumping Sudano onto the floor. "I said get up!" He met the man's glare with a withering look of his own. "Frawck told me he'd use the fire alarm if there was an emergency." He gestured toward the furiously ringing bell. "That means he wants us!"

"Okay." Sudano stumbled to his feet, pulling on a pair of pants. "But you'd better be right!"

Dowling picked up his AK-47 and checked the load. "As if you could do something to me if I wasn't!" He turned to watch the rest of the fomori squad,, each of them hurriedly pulling on clothes while they checked their weapons.

"Come on!" Dowling checked his watch. "Two minutes!" He stopped at the door, watching as the squad finished suiting up.

Tarver found him there. "Sarge, Frawck asked me to come and tell you..."

"Tell me what, Tarver?"

"Just a minute..." The young fomor hit the side of his head with a gloved hand. "I'm tryin' to remember." He slapped himself again, harder. "Oh, yeah." He looked into Dowling's face, eyes blank as he struggled to repeat the Spiral leader's message: "He said to 'assemble the guards in the

quadrangle.” Tarver grinned proudly. “That’s the big open area between the buildings.”

“Yeah, Tarver,” Dowling nodded back. “I know.” He yelled the information to the rest of his troops. “Let’s move it! Assembly in the quadrangle!”

Sudano passed with a grunt, his M-16 at high port, safety off. “They don’t pay us enough for this!”

Dowling chuckled as he watched the rest of the squad suit up. Ten things that had once been mere men, each more bizzare than the next. *But the best in the business!* Dowling thumbed the safety off his own weapon and headed for the stairs. “Set up a perimeter,” he bellowed, his voice clearly audible over the din of the fire alarm. “Cover both flanks!”

As one, the fomori charged down the stairs, racing for the open area of the quadrangle.



“How do we kill these guys?” Jay stayed under cover as the fomori raced down the stairs in front of him.

“We rip them apart!” Aaron’s eyes gleamed savagely at the idea.

“No, stupid!” Eater-of-Bears shook her head at his confidence. “Fomori are designed to fight us. They’ll have some kind of powers...”

“Not to mention their guns and silver bullets.” Heidel’s tone was dry.

"So what do we do?" Aaron turned to glare at his packmates. "Run away?"

Jay shook his head. "No, I don't think we have to do that." A smile came to his lips. "There are other things we might try...."



Sudano was less than pleased with the position Dowling had stuck him with. He always seemed to end up covering the right flank. Sudano scratched at his forehead, stared back at the quadrangle and shook his head.

There was a flash of white, and suddenly Sudano found himself lying on his back, the huge form of a snow-white Garou on top of him.

The fomor groped for his weapon. Sudano opened his mouth to yell for help, to warn the others, but he found he had no breath.

He looked down to see the dripping claws of the white wolf, and felt the burning pain reach his brain. The fomor realized with a sense of wonder that his throat had been cut. Sudano tried to push the beast away, tried to grab his rifle, but his strength was ebbing, flowing into the ground with the last of his blood. The world seemed to close in around him, his sight irising down until all he could see were the gleaming fangs of the wolf on his chest....

Pilson had only recently joined this particular fomori team. His previous tour had been in the Amazon, guarding logging machinery from Garou attacks. The werewolves he had faced there had been difficult enemies—especially in the forest, where they were perfectly at home. Pilson had been more than happy to transfer back to the real world—the world of concrete and asphalt, where nobody could sneak up on you.

In position now, he took a second to adjust the sights on his M-16. If there was going to be trouble, it would start here, on the flank. Pilson knew from experience that Garou always came after the point and flank guards first. That left the soft underbelly of the formation helpless, ready to be taken at their leisure.

There was a sound behind him. Before he could move, a huge, clawed paw ripped the rifle out of his hand, taking the tip of his index finger with it.

He never felt the pain. Before he had time to scream, a second claw slashed across the base of his spine, cutting communications between his body and his brain.

Pilson died without making a sound.

That's two down. Jay nodded as Aaron and Eater-of-Bears finished their work. *Without any shots fired.* His face was grim. *It's so easy to kill! But I can't see*

any other way. He sighed and signaled to Heidel. Not if we're going to have a chance to save my mother and all the kids here...



The eight remaining fomori clustered in the quadrangle, close to the wall of the big dormitory building. They kept a wary eye on the cadets, who were still racing to their positions.

"Where's Frawck and the rest of his people?" Haynes kept his head moving, trying to see in all directions at once.

"You know how the Dancers are." Dowling checked the back sight of his rifle, setting it for 100 meters. "Not as quick as normal people."

"They're nutso, you mean." Karlson cradled his MAC-10, eyes wandering over the crowd of cadets. "I never trusted them."

"Trust them or not, they're some kinda fighters." Dowling popped a stick of gum into his mouth. "We've all seen that!"

"Maybe, but..."

Before Karlson could finish his thought, two huge shapes dropped into the midst of the clustered troops.



Jay rolled over the top of the nearest form, landing on his feet before the humanoid had time to react. He lashed out with his claws, slashing through the flesh of the man struggling to get up, turning his face into a streaming mass of blood and soft tissue. The man collapsed, hands coming up to cradle his ruined face.

Jay took a step to his right and kicked at the weapon another human was trying to raise. The gun went off, firing nearly straight up, bullets chipping red dust off the side of the dormitory.

Jay grabbed the gun as it continued to fire away and bent the barrel as he pulled it from its owner's grip. The man screamed, reaching for another weapon. Jay reached out again, grabbed the man's right arm, and pulled hard, claws digging into the flesh of his opponent's wrist.

The hand tore free, throwing Jay off balance. He fell backward, landing on the base of his spine. For an instant his vision blurred. Desperately, Jay rolled to the side, scrambling to get his feet under him. His vision cleared as he came to his feet, already scanning the area in front of him, searching for an enemy.

He found one. A squat man, covered in some kind of body armor, was standing against the dormitory wall, gun up, barrel questing toward Jay. Jay realized that he couldn't reach the armored man

before he fired. He twisted to one side and threw the fleshy lump he was holding with all his strength.

The hand hit Dowling squarely in the forehead, an unclipped fingernail opening a ragged cut in his scalp. He staggered, blood dripping into his eyes.

Before he could recover, Jay was on him, slavering jaws locking onto the fomor's neck, claws ripping at the man's armor, searching for gaps—and finding them.

It was over in seconds. Jay's claws ripped through unshielded flesh, snapping bones, until they finally drove through a large, fleshy muscle. He felt the heart give one last beat. Then the man was still.

Jay turned away from the body, eyes searching for another foe, but there was no one left. All of the fomori were down, formerly dangerous foes turned into bleeding lumps of flesh.

"You okay?" Jay saw Heidel licking at a paw.

"No problem." The tall young Garou grinned at his friend. "Just caught a scratch on that one's pistol." He gestured to the remains of what had been Karlson.

"This one's got armor!" Jay pointed at his final kill. "Like a beetle!"

"Pentex work." Eater-of-Bears looked up from her kill, her face showing her distaste. "Supposed to give them more of a chance against us."

"Where are the Black Spiral Dancers?" Heidel's eyes searched the shadows of the quadrangle. "They must have heard this!"

"Maybe they're deafened by the alarm." Eater-of-Bears held a hand over her ears. "I know it's bothering me."

"We can't let them take us by surprise again." Jay motioned for the others to follow him. "Let's get back to the Field House, join up with Colonel Sweet."

"Look at that!" Heidel was staring into the quadrangle where the cadets were turned away from the dormitory, single-mindedly looking in the other direction.

"It's the Delirium." Eater-of-Bears dismissed them with a wave. "They can't see us; it would destroy their sanity."

"Amazing." Heidel shook his head.

"Shouldn't we try to get them out of here?" Jay looked over the milling crowd of youngsters. "They might get hurt...."

"How?" Aaron gestured toward them. "If we get closer, they'll panic."

"I guess you're right." Jay started moving toward the Field House. "Still, I wish we could do something about them..."



Colonel Sweet was waiting with his 'specials' when Jay and the pack returned to the Field House. "Nice work out there." The big man's smile was even more compelling when seen against the pure black fur of his Crinos form. "You made that look easy."

"We got lucky." Jay looked back to the quadrangle, where the cadets were once more looking toward the dormitory, several just discovering the bloody remains of the troopers. "They seemed confused, as if they didn't know what to do."

"They knew." Sweet touched Jay on the shoulder. "You just didn't give them time to do it."

"Whatever." Jay shook his head, shrugging off the praise. "The Black Spiral Dancers and Frawck will be a bigger problem."

The Colonel nodded. "You're right about that." He looked at Jay. "What do you want to do about them?"

"Me? You're the boss here."

"Of my pack." He motioned to the transformed cadets behind him. "You've got your own to worry about."

"My own pack..." Jay's eyes traveled across the forms of Heidel, Eater-of-Bears, and Aaron. For the first time, he realized that they'd all come to listen to his words, follow his advice, his orders. *But what will they do when they find out who I really am....*

Frawck was still frantically working at the computer when he heard the muffled sound of gunshots in the quadrangle outside. He punched one last command into the console, watched one last ACCESS DENIED scroll across the screen, then headed for the door. Just outside, he came across his pack of Dancers, all waiting in the secretary's office, each nervously reacting to the hellishly loud, endlessly repeating fire bell.

"Turn the damned thing off!" Frawck thundered as he saw Dwargh shivering against the wall, trying to cover his ears with dwarfish hands. "Do I have to do everything?!" He shook his head and stalked to the control panel on the wall, ripped the door open. He studied the array of switches inside, then touched the one marked FIRE ALARM, and nodded in satisfaction when the bell stopped its ringing.

"There!" He turned to the pack. "Now, I'm aware that the mage is on the loose." He looked around the room. "You all seem to be here." He inclined his head toward Dwargh, his second in command. "Where are the fomori?"

Dwargh was still trying to get himself upright, using the wall as a brace. "I think they went outside, to the quadrangle."

"There was shooting out there," another of the Dancers volunteered.

"Did anyone take a look to see what the shooting meant?" Frawck scanned the faces of his pack, saw no sign that anybody had. "Well, I guess we'd better go find out, don't you think?"

"Shall we shift to Crinos?" That from Kracklw, who looked perfectly normal as a homid, but lacked a tail in Crinos.

"No." Frawck shook his head. "The students will be out there. We don't want to throw them into a panic."

The others nodded.

"Dwargh, you take Kracklw and..." he looked appraisingly at his pack. "...Mgret and find your way to the back of this dump—look around for any sign of Caldwell." He rubbed his chin. "Talnös, you and Lvyä check out the prisoners—make sure they're still secure." He motioned toward the front door. "The rest of you, come with me."

He paused, one hand on the doorknob. "And please, be careful. That helicopter will be arriving in," he glanced at his watch, "less than an hour." He ran his eyes over each of the Dancers' faces. "Don't make me look bad."



Dr. Caldwell chuckled at the scene unfolding on the campus above. *Those stupid Spiral Dancers don't have a chance*, he thought, watching as they headed out the office door. *They don't even know that Sweet and the outsiders are free!* He touched a control, panning a roof surveillance camera to get a better view. *Jay and his people are already in position, waiting.* He studied the rest of the screens. *I wonder where Sweet is?* He turned away from the surveillance system, swiveled his chair in front of the school's mainframe. He punched a series of commands, smiling slightly as he noted the responses on screen. *First I've got to get all this preliminary work done.* Another series of commands. *Got to be ready when the chopper comes.* His smile widened. *Nice of Pentex to send it just when I need it most....*



Jay crouched under the bleachers that bordered the outdoor track, observing three Spiral Dancers as they slipped around the corner of the office building. He glanced to the sides, checking the positioning of his people. He signaled to Eater-of-Bears, lying under the other corner of the bleachers, completely out of sight.

Talnos and Lvya raced into the entry hall to the gym. They'd run right through the mess in the quadrangle—which convinced them that it would be a good idea to get under cover as soon as possible.

"Did you see what they did to Dowling and his people?" Talnos' eyes were wide, the pupils dilated with surprise and excitement.

"Hard to miss it." Lvya's voice was deliberately calm, reflecting her age and experience. "Those were good troops. There must be more Garou here than we expected." She scanned the open area outside the glass doorways. "Stay sharp and be ready to shift."

"I will." Talnos moved down the long corridor, heading for the entrance that led into the main section of the gym. "Do you think the prisoners will give us any trouble?"

"Those hicks?" Lvya pulled her klaive out, ran a finger along the blade, smiling as blood welled up. "I don't think so."

"But what about that Colonel Sweet guy?" Talnos was almost at the door now, looking back at Lvya. "He seemed awfully big!"

"I'd throat him in a second!"

A voice came from behind them, soft and confident. "Would you, now?"

Behind the office building, Eater-of-Bears broke cover, running, in her giant Hispo form, from under the concealment of the bleachers. Her path took her toward the cover of a copse of trees at the far end of the track.

"Look!" Dwargh pointed at the racing gray figure. "It's one of the prisoners! She's trying to get away!"

"Let's get her!" Kracklw said as he shifted into wolf form, springing after the swift Garou.

"Wait!" Mgret shook her head as Dwargh shifted and followed his packmate. "It could be a..." The others ignored her, racing after the wolf-form. "Hell," she muttered to herself. "They're right—who's going to be stupid enough to try and trap us!"

A nearly instantaneous shift later, *three* wolves were on the trail, blending their howls in a ghastly litany. They raced along the edge of the track, approaching the trees that marked the end of the school and the beginning of the natural world.

Behind them, Jay also shifted to Hispo and began running. He had to be in position when the trap was sprung—it was his job to block the way out.

Eater-of-Bears reached the woods first, pulling ahead of her pursuers with a sudden burst of speed as she reached the tree line.

The Spiral Dancers were close behind, baying their insane call as they raced along. They dashed

into the woods almost on the heels of Eater—and were shocked when they found Heidel waiting for them, already shifted into Crinos form, claws up and ready to fight.

The three Dancers tried to stop, tried to shift forms, but even as their bodies melted from one form to another, they came under attack by two more Garou, one white, one reddish brown—both in Crinos, both more than ready to fight.

Even with all the advantages slanted toward Jay's pack, the fight was a deadly one. Dwargh, convinced that he was about to die, suddenly went into frenzy, madly striking out in all directions. He fought like some huge whirling dervish, slashing friend and foe alike with long, carefully sharpened claws.

For an instant, the unexpected ferocity of his attack tipped the balance, giving the two still-rational Spiral Dancers a moment to catch their breath and prepare an attack—but before they could swing into action, Jay arrived, thundering into the tightly packed threesome from the rear. He shouldered the rearmost Garou to one side and sprang on Dwargh's back, driving him to the ground.

Jay sank his fangs deep into the insane Dancer's shoulder, all the while rending and tearing at his opponent's back and belly with powerful slashes of his claws.

No longer impeded by Dwargh's wildly flailing figure, Aaron sprang toward Kracklw, sinking ready claws into the Spiral Dancer's chest. The white-furred Garou, nearly in frenzy himself, ignored the other's defensive slashes and bore in, never giving Kracklw time to reach for a klaive or other weapon as he fought for a chance to reach his enemy's throat and the unguarded jugular vein.

For long seconds, the two Garou stood chest-to-chest, each clawing away huge hunks of the other's flesh as they tried to get a final, deadly grip on one of their opponent's vulnerable spots.

Finally, Aaron managed to close his fangs on Kracklw's neck, exulting as the Dancer's blood pumped, red and salty, into his mouth. He bit down harder and felt bone crack under the pressure...

Then it was over. Kracklw spasmed once, twice—and fell limp. Aaron let the dead weight fall to the ground and whirled in place, searching for another foe.

But none were left standing. Jay had finished Dwargh, his attack from the rear overwhelming the Dancer's frenzy-weakened defenses, and Mgret had not had a chance against the combined strength of Heidel and Eater-of-Bears.

The four looked at each other. They were covered with blood, some of it their own—but they knew that they had won *this* battle.

Now for the rest of the war, Jay thought, looking

back toward the school. He straightened up, surprised at how alive he felt. "Let's go," he said, gesturing to the others. "We're not done yet."

As one, they started back.



Colonel Sweet decided to take his time with Talnos and Lvya, turning the fight into a lesson for the six remaining members of his 'special' group. As soon as he alerted the two Dancers to his presence by speaking, he raced forward and snapped Lvya's knee with a vicious, whirling kick.

"As you can see, gentlemen," he began his lecture, dancing a few steps back, giving Talnos time to draw his klaive, "even *Garou* joints are vulnerable if enough pressure is applied." He turned to his still-standing foe, bowing slightly as the young Dancer's weapon gleamed in the overhead lighting. "Now, with a little help from this *freak*, I'll show you how to handle an opponent with a klaive." He smiled, inclining his head toward the drawn weapon. "Although that is a miserably short example." His smile broadened as he looked the Spiral Dancer in the eye. "I guess it's true what they say about a man and his knife."

Talnos growled, fell into a fighting stance, weapon out and ready.

"Note how our friend here presents his weapon." Sweet moved forward, stepping lightly, always on the balls of his feet. "He has the point forward, the edge toward his body..."

The Spiral Dancer lunged, the point of the klaive heading straight for Sweet's stomach.

"This allows for very fast thrustin' attacks." Sweet turned his body with incredible speed, letting the point of the weapon flash by him even as he caught and held Talnos' arm. "Although, if they are not fast enough..." He exerted pressure, forcing Talnos to drop the klaive. "...they are less than useless."

He released Talnos' arm and allowed the suddenly frightened Spiral Dancer to back away as he picked up the klaive. "Here, boy." Sweet tossed the blade back to his opponent. "Why don't you try that again?"

Behind them, Lvya began yelling, cursing Sweet and the other Garou in the little hallway. "Such language!" The big officer gestured to his pack of youngsters. "You'd almost think she wants me to turn toward her!" He grinned, bowed again to Talnos, who was standing a few steps away, nervously fingering the klaive. "Which, of course, would give this one a chance to stick his weapon in my back." The smile widened. "But you'd never do anythin' like that, would you, boy?"

Talnos was too shaken to answer; he just watched as Sweet turned completely around, presenting his unprotected rear to the Black Spiral Dancer.

"I didn't think you would." Sweet turned, glancing at his opponent over his shoulder. "But maybe you'd better rethink your position."

Talnos suddenly screamed a battle cry and leaped forward, klaive locked in his paw, point down.

"About time," Sweet said as he flowed into Hispo form. "Note how important balance is..." He threw himself against the Spiral Dancer's ankles, sending the hapless Talnos stumbling forward. "Just a little push at an off-balance opponent..." Suddenly, Sweet was back in Crinos, grabbing the Black Spiral Dancer by the hair, forcing his face into the wall, "...and all kinds of things happen." There was a *THUD* as Talnos' head rammed into the wall.

Sweet picked up the klaive, holding it lightly in his hand, balancing it by the point. "There's only one more thing I want to show you." In a blur of motion, he swiveled, all his weight on his forward foot as he threw the knife toward the far wall—and into the chest of Lvya, who had finally managed to struggle to her feet.

There was a second dull *THUD* as the blade drove through her chest and into her heart. She struggled for a moment, body pinned to the wall, then relaxed into death.

"Never assume a downed opponent is out of the

fight." He stepped forward, lifted the limp body of Talnos in both hands. "Never!" He dropped the body of the Spiral Dancer across his knee, snapping the spine with a palpable CRACK. "Any questions?"



This is going too fast, Dr. Caldwell thought as he watched the various battles on his surveillance screens. I'm not going to have time to get everything I need ready to move. He flicked a switch, checked another camera position. They haven't even done anything about the sterilization countdown. The mage sighed. Why are Garou always so slow to understand mechanical things? He turned to his console, began punching in commands. I'm going to have to see what I can do about that. He rubbed the side of his face. Perhaps a slight change in genetic material...

He typed in another series of commands, nodded at the machine's security query, punched in the appropriate reply. *There's nothing wrong with their hearing, he grinned. I've done enough research to know that!* The special program he'd called up scrolled onto the screen. He touched a key, approved the start-up procedure. *Let's see how they handle a little specially modulated noise...*

The program began to run. Long-unused hardware rose into place, warmed up....

Frawck and his cadre of Black Spiral Dancers reached the edge of the quadrangle—and found themselves staring at the mangled bodies of Dowling and his fomori.

“Garou did this.” Nslin stooped to lift the squad leader’s arm—and almost fell as it popped free of his torso. “Powerful Garou.”

“Who?” Frawck scanned the school yard, eyes running over the few cadets still left. Most had dashed away as soon as the alarm bell stopped, but a few still lingered, carefully looking away from the carnage in front of the headquarters building. “Sweet and the others are locked up.” He turned toward his followers. “What Garou could be left?”

“I don’t know.” Nslin dropped the remains of Dowling, kicked at a mass of flesh that might have been Karlson. “Are we sure that Sweet is still secure?”

Frawck turned toward the bulk of the Field House. “That’s what I sent Talnos and Lvya to find out.”

“Where are they?”

The Dancer leader shook his head. “I don’t know.” He came to a decision. “Pick up those guns.”

“Guns!” Jmsyn stared at him in disbelief. “Why would we need guns?!”

Frawck bent over, picked up Dowling's AK-47. "We may not." He checked the clip; it was full. He *never got off a shot!* "But these are loaded with *silver* bullets." A nervous grin creased his face. "And it never hurts to have an edge."

The other Dancer shrugged and picked up Karlson's MAC-10. "Okay, now we have an edge." He stared at the Spiral Dancer leader. "So what do we do?"

Before Frawck could answer, the quadrangle lights went out.

"What the hell?!" Nslin looked around. The few remaining cadets also looked puzzled. "What happened to the lights?"

"It must be Caldwell's work." The Black Spiral Dancer's mouth curled into a snarl. "He's trying to confuse us!"

"With darkness?" Nslin snickered. "He doesn't know us very..."

At that moment, sirens carefully placed at the end points of the quadrangle began to sound—a hideous, atonal screeching that ran up and down the audible range. Nslin fell to his knees, trying desperately to cover sensitive ears that were already bleeding.

"Bastard!" Frawck screamed curses as he reeled in the middle of the quadrangle. He brought his rifle up, triggered a burst toward one of the wailing sirens. "I'll get you for this!" He fired again, this

time hitting and shattering a speaker cone. The screeching lessened, but did not silence. "I'll peel your skin off an inch at a time!" Frawck fired again, aiming at another of the sirens. "Then I'll eat your heart!"



That seems to have done the trick. Dr. Caldwell smiled, watching the gyrating figures of the Spiral Dancers. *At least, it'll keep them busy for a few extra minutes.* He turned back to his console, stopped for a moment as a thought struck him. *Of course, there is one more thing I might try.* He smiled and picked up a telephone receiver, dialing quickly. *Yes, I think this might turn out to be quite enlightening....*



"What the hell is that!" Heidel's expression showed a touch of pain as he turned toward the distant mass of the school. An incredible sound was destroying the silence of the night, blanketing the area of the school and spilling over onto the rest of the countryside.

"Sounds like some sort of alarm." Jay squinted toward the campus. "Looks like the lights are off, too."

"Come on." Aaron started to rush forward. "Let's get back there!"

"Take it easy." Jay closed a hand on Aaron's shoulder, holding him in place. "You're still bleeding from the last fight." He shook his head as he saw the look on the Silver Fang's face. "Renown won't do you any good if you're dead."

Eater-of-Bears nodded in agreement. "Besides, that alarm is *very* loud—deafening for us." She shuddered. "And to be frank, this whole place stinks of humans!" She turned to Jay. "Why should we hurry back to help them?"

"Colonel Sweet is in there." Heidel's voice was low, steady. "And he's not a human."

"No." The Red Talon glared at the tall Garou. "He's just a power-mad Shadow Lord who's sold his soul to the Wyrms!" She pointed at his hand. "As you're on the verge of doing!"

"We can't waste time with this now!" Jay stepped between Heidel and Eater-of-Bears. "It's not humans we're worrying about here." He caught the Red Talon's eye. "It's Gaia—or don't you remember that black stain we saw?"

"I remember...."

"We've got to get to Caldwell, shut him down." He glanced back toward the darkness of the campus. "That's what this fight is about." *At least—* he thought—*to me!* "To do that, we've got to rejoin

Colonel Sweet and finish the Spiral Dancers." He looked toward Heidel. "But we can't do him any good if we rush in and get killed."

The tall Garou nodded slowly. "What do you have in mind?"

"We send a scout." Jay met Heidel's look. "Me." He gestured toward Aaron. "You and Eater will stay out here with him—try to get the bleeding to stop."

"And what are you going to do?"

Jay shifted into human form. "I'm going to *walk* into the school." He grinned. "The sirens aren't so bad in this form."

"You're crazy!" Heidel shook his head. "Frawck and the others will kill you on sight!"

Jay inclined his head toward the dark buildings in the distance. "Not as long as those sirens are making all that noise." He shrugged. "Even if they do see me, as long as we're all in Homid form, I can outrun them." He smiled at his friend. "Right?"

Heidel snorted. "Maybe—but running's not going to do you any good if the Spiral Dancers picked up the guns."

Jay's eyes narrowed. "I didn't think of that." Another shrug. "I'll just have to avoid them." He looked back toward the school. "If there are any controls for those noise-makers, they'll be in my fath..." he made a face as he slipped again. "...In Dr. Caldwell's office." He pointed to the door at the

near edge of the office building. "If that door's not locked, I can get access without going through the quadrangle."

Heidel nodded. "That might work." He put a hand on Jay's shoulder. "But we'll be waiting for you right at the edge of the woods—and we're coming in the minute those sirens are turned off...."

"Fair enough." Jay thought for a second. "I'll meet you over there, behind the office." He pointed. "Near the side entrance to the Field House."

"We'll be there."

Jay nodded, put his hand on top of his friend's. "I know you will."



Colonel Sweet shuddered as the first wails of the siren flooded through the Field House. *That bastard!* he thought. *He programmed those sirens to take care of me!* The big Garou grimaced. *And with Frawck and those others waiting out there, they might just do the job!*

"Quick!" he shouted to be heard above the din of the sirens. "Change into homid form!" He shifted. "It's not as sensitive to sound!"

Zorn, one of the newer students, was already writhing on the floor, howling as pain flooded

through his brain. Sweet knelt at his side. "Concentrate! Make the change." He grabbed the youngster by the ears, shook him. "Do it!"

The cadet, half-insane from the din, slashed at the Colonel, drawing blood as he drove the big officer away.

"Fool!" Sweet fingered the long, bleeding gash. "I'm tryin' to *help* you!" He looked around at the rest of his charges.

The other cadets had successfully made the change, and were staring at him, shaken by this unexpected turn of events.

"Don't just stand there," the Colonel hissed at them. "Terry! You check the front door, see what Frawck and his people are up to! The rest of you," he ordered, gesturing them toward the contorting figure on the floor, "hold him down!"

Boys moved, one rushing to the doors, the others looking for an opening in the flurry of claws and teeth that was Zorn. "Go on." Sweet moved to the side of the hall, pulled Telnos' klaive free of the ruined body of Lvya. "Grab him!"

Brant and Jennings looked at one another. They had been in Sweet's 'special' classes for almost a year now, and they had learned to trust the big man's judgment. Brant nodded as he saw the look in Jennings' eye and, as one, they leaped onto Zorn's body, Brant grabbing one of the younger

cadet's flailing hands, Jennings holding his feet down.

"Good!" Sweet was right next to them now, hovering above Zorn's muzzle. "Now..." He brought the hilt of the klaive down hard, smashing its silvery weight directly between the struggling Garou's eyes. Zorn sagged, and Brant took the opportunity to get a better grip on his arm. "Come on, Zorn!" The Colonel was kneeling on the youngster's chest now, the klaive ready in his right hand. "I can't let you jeopardize everyone! Change!" He grabbed Zorn's ears again, shaking them, searching the stunned eyes of the Garou for the smallest sign of understanding. "Change!"

Zorn's eyes refocused, but instead of shifting to Homid form, he swept one powerful arm back, tossing Brant free. As the other cadets watched in horror, the insane Garou's fangs snapped toward Colonel Sweet's throat.

"I'm sorry, boy." The officer rammed his metallic arm into the cadet's teeth, blocking the thrust, jamming the jaws open. Zorn tried to shriek as the silver burned his mouth, seared his tongue. He tried to pull away—but he was stuck fast.

"I gave you every chance I could." The klaive came down, point glistening—and Zorn was finally still.

"I hated to do that." Colonel Sweet gently pulled

the still-locked jaws from his silver arm. "But a Garou in frenzy is a menace to everyone." He looked at the quiet students around him. "Friend or foe."

"What do we do now, sir?" Brant was holding his arm at an odd angle. *Dislocated or broken*, Sweet realized.

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On whether Frawck and his Spiral Dancers decide we're worth comin' after in the middle of this din!"



Jay jogged out of the woods, felt the jolt of distaste as his feet touched the cinders of the outdoor track. *Funny how life goes full circle*, he thought. *Seems like only yesterday the most important thing in the world for me was winning a race on this very track*. He sighed. *Life was simpler then*. The memory of the finish of that race—and his first transformation—swept over him. *Sweet planned that*, he realized. *I wonder why?* Almost to the school now. *I wonder whose side he's really on*.

Jay pulled up just before reaching the bleachers. *I'll be able to see the quadrangle in a minute*. He took a moment to run his fingers through his hair, making sure it wasn't too wild. *Gotta look normal*.

He straightened his clothing. *Don't want to call attention to myself.* Jay looked around, caught a movement at the edge of the woods. *Heidel's in position.* He waved to his friend, took a deep breath, and stepped forward, onto the pathway that led to Marietta Mil's main campus.

The sirens grew louder the closer he got to the school, the sound painful even in human form. Jay stopped for a moment, pressed his hands over his ears. *Damn!* He grew angry as the noise continued to stab at him. *Is Caldwell trying to kill us all?* The sneering face of his foster-father appeared, unbidden, in his mind—the mage's hands controlling the decibel level, all the while laughing at the pain it was causing the Garou. *I'll rip that smile off his face! I'll...*

Jay took a deep breath, held the bubbling rage at bay. *No. I won't change.* The sound renewed its attack, chipping at his resolve. Jay hardened himself, pushed the anger as far down as it would go. *Later, he promised himself. After I turn off those damn sirens!*

He tried to turn his mind away from the noise, and focus on something else. *The other kids—the cadets—I wonder what they're doing?* He forced himself to keep moving. He reached the end of the bleachers; the main buildings were just in front of him now. *They're probably calling their folks and screaming for help.* Jay pursed his lips at the thought.

Would Caldwell be stupid enough to leave the phones turned on? Then the realization hit him. It doesn't matter! The place is full of rich kids—most of them have cellular phones! That would change things. There'll be cops and parents showing up before long. How much time did they have? Jay glanced up at the still-dark sky, noted the height of the moon. There's not a cop in the world that'll come out before daybreak, he thought. That gives us at least an hour, maybe a little more. Jay began moving again, forcing himself to move toward the heart of the sound. Not very much time. He gritted his teeth, trotted toward the dark bulk that marked the office building. I've got to hurry.



In the quadrangle, Frawck and the remnants of his pack were swaying on their feet, fighting to maintain human form while enduring the constant pain of the wailing sirens. "We've got to get under cover!" Frawck panted, fighting for control. "Somewhere away from this hellish noise!"

"Where?" Nslin had torn strips from his clothing and stuffed them in his ears. "Those sirens are everywhere!"

"In the office building!" Frawck pointed toward the shadows behind them. "The mage has a room

there." The Black Spiral Dancer remembered the muted sound of gunfire. "I think it might be soundproof."

"Soundproofed. That means it'll be quiet!" There was a touch of white froth at the corner of Jmsyn's mouth. "Yes, I want quiet!" His face shivered, half-changed, shifted back. "Now!"

"Take the guns!" Frawck bent to pick up the AK-47 he'd dropped when the noise started. "We might need them!"

"Guns." Nslin's teeth lengthened, gleamed. "I don't want no stinking..." The sirens changed their pitch slightly, the sound screeching upward another decibel. Nslin fell to the ground, smashing his head desperately against the concrete. "The pain!" He tore at his ears. Blood exploded from him.

"No!" Frawck threw himself on his packmate, grabbed the other's hands before they could penetrate further, rip out the eardrums. "Don't!" The other Black Spiral Dancer fought frantically, trying his best to push Frawck off, but the tall leader was too strong, and had the benefit of leverage. "In the office, Nslin." He pinned the other's hands under his knees, held the struggling Garou's head, staring into his agonized face. "It'll be quiet in the mage's office."

"Mage." Nslin's gaze was dull, his eyes glazed with pain. "Quiet."

Frawck stood up. "Jmsyn, grab the guns." He picked Nslin up bodily, slung him over his shoulder. "We've got to get inside." He glared up at the sirens. "Before those things kill us."



Jay ducked into the back of the office building. *Gotta stay out of sight!* He'd caught a glimpse of the little group of Black Spiral Dancers as he passed the quadrangle opening. *They looked like they were fighting!* Jay clutched at the sides of his head as the siren changed pitch again. *No wonder!* He gritted his teeth. *It's all I can do to keep my head straight!*

Jay stared at the hallway, trying to remember which door led where. *I need to get to Caldwell's office,* he thought as he started down the hall, checking doorplates as he went. *His computer console should control everything in the compound.* Another wail from above. *Including those damn sirens!* Jay squinted at a door just ahead. *I think that one...*

Jay rushed to the doorway, impelled by the increasing volume of the sirens. *This better be right!* It was. Jay tried the doorknob. *Locked!* He glared at the door, then took a step back and kicked.

The door shuddered at the impact—and held. *Damn!* Jay stepped back again. *That always works on*

television! He shook his head, tried again; a third time...

The door snapped open, bounced off the wall, slapped against Jay's side as he rushed into the office. *The console'll be in back!* Jay pushed through the outer, secretarial office, reached the inner door. *Built into Caldwell's desk.* He tried the door. *This better not be locked!*

It wasn't. Jay stepped through and found himself in blessed near-silence. *Thank Gaia!* He glanced around, noted that he could still hear the sirens—but they weren't nearly as loud. *This place must be soundproofed!*

He took a deep breath, allowed himself a moment to relax. *Okay, get a grip...* Another breath. *Good! Now, let's find that console!* He strode to the mage's desk, dropped into the big padded chair, and found himself suppressing a tiny shudder of fear. *He's not your father!* Jay told himself, glaring at the computer console which lay exposed, its protective cover rolled back into the desktop. *Now, let's see what we can do with this thing...*

The screen in front of him was divided into four quadrants. Three showed various points around the school, the fourth...

What the hell is that? Jay leaned closer. *A sterilization timer?!* He reached toward the keyboard. *With forty-five minutes left.* Jay shook his

head. *I'd better figure out what that means... and quickly!*



Heidel watched as Jay disappeared into the office building. "I hope he makes it."

Eater-of-Bears snorted, nodded.

"You too, eh?" Heidel smiled at the big wolf.

"We should have gone with him." Aaron's eyes were hard. "Staying here like this is cowardly."

Heidel shook his head. "Look at yourself!" He gestured toward Aaron's still-trickling wounds. "Do you think you could be any *real* help in there?"

"I can still fight!"

"Don't get impatient. There'll be more fighting." Heidel pointed toward the school. "Colonel Sweet and his pack are still in there, along with the rest of the Black Spiral Dancers!"

"And we should be with them.," Aaron tried to push himself upright, reopening one of his chest wounds, starting a new trickle of blood. "Not out here hiding!"

Eater-of-Bears leaped to Aaron's side, pushing him back down with her muzzle. Heidel was only a step behind. "We won't be hiding for long." The big cadet motioned toward the black mass of the school. "Jay will get those noise-makers turned off, and then..."

"Colonel Sweet means a lot to you, doesn't he?" Aaron settled back down, grimacing slightly as another half-healed wound tore open.

"He's been like a father to me." Heidel's eyes went hard. "More than my *real* father: Howard Heidel, the Wall Street Whiz!" The big cadet slammed a fist into the ground. "He never really gave a damn about *me*; I was just part of his image." Heidel's mouth curled. "The only thing that really mattered to him was how much money he was making and what new toys he was going to spend it on!"

"That sounds tough," Aaron sighed. "Colonel Sweet was different?"

Heidel nodded. "He spent time with me, taught me what it meant to be Garou."

"Garou don't tie themselves to Wyrms-tools." Eater-of-Bears spat the words out.

"Maybe the Colonel wasn't given a choice." Heidel stared at his own metal hand. "Like me..."

Aaron nodded slowly, then looked at Heidel. "That might be so—but if Sweet knows about honor and what it means to be a Garou, then what is he doing here, working with—what'd he call it?—a Progenitor mage?"

Heidel shook his head. "I don't know." He stared out toward the school. "I just don't know."



I'm never going to get this! Jay stared at the screen in front of him. *I don't know squat about computers.* Outside, the tone of the sirens changed again, shrieking higher, penetrating the soundproofing of the building. Great. Jay shook his head as the new tone tore into his brain. *Just what I needed!*

"Looks like you could use some help."

Jay whirled at the voice, kicking the wheeled mass of the chair out of his way as he stared into the darkness of the office.

"Nervous, aren't we? No reason to be afraid. It's just me, Kevin."

He stepped forward into the lambent glow of the computer console, and smiled. "Your little brother."



"They're still out there." Brant was careful to keep out of the view of anyone in the quadrangle, flattening himself against the wall next to the door, peering around the edge. "The tall one..." His brow furrowed as he struggled to remember the name. "Frawck. He's carrying one of the Dancers over his shoulder." He leaned forward. "Another one is just standing there—he looks out of it."

Colonel Sweet stood behind the cadet, trying to use his iron will to ignore the effects of the sirens. "That's three. There should be one more."

Brant nodded. "I see him. He's leaning down, picking up a gun." The cadet turned toward the Colonel. "Why are they taking guns? They don't really need them, do they?"

"Most Black Spiral Dancers are metis." The Colonel motioned Brant to keep watching as they talked. "They grow up underground, in the deep darkness of the Wyrms' dens." He grinned. "That's why their eyes are so big in Crinos form." His smile widened. "And why their hearin' is so acute. They're payin' for that now—that noise is much more painful to them than it is to us." He winced as the sirens' wail went up in pitch again. "If they tried to stay in Crinos form, they'd go insane in a matter of minutes." He nodded in the direction of the Dancer carrying the guns. "So they're gonna have to fight us in Homid form—and they want the weapons for defense."

"Against us?"

"That's right." Sweet nodded. "That noise would destroy our brains as quickly as it would theirs if we went to Crinos form." He gestured. "While they hold the guns, they have the upper hand."

"What are we going to do?"

"We're gonna wait." Sweet rubbed at his forehead, trying to drive the pain away. "There's nothin' else we can do."



"I don't have a brother." Jay had slipped out from behind the console, giving himself the bulk of the room to maneuver in.

"What am I, then?" The younger boy held out his arms. "Chopped liver?"

It can't be! Jay couldn't take his eyes off the other's face. *But Art was right—he looks just like I did a few years ago....* Jay shook his head; his brain was already aching from the renewed wailing of the siren. "I don't know what you are," he took a step forward, "but you're not my brother."

"Actually, you're right," the other boy grinned. "I'm really you—the new, *improved* version."

"Grown in one of those tanks downstairs."

"You'd know more about that than I do. Father hasn't shown those to me yet."

"He's *not* your father." Or *mine*... Jay thought.

"What makes you say that?" Kevin looked into Jay's eyes. "He made us, didn't he?"

"Maybe he did." Jay nodded. "But does that make him our father?"

"What do you want? Love?"

"I don't want to be used!" Jay's eyes flashed with anger. "Not by you, not by my so-called father—not by anybody!"

"Okay." Kevin shrugged. "I won't try to use you." He stepped forward, gestured toward the console. "But I'd like to help you."

"How?"

"I know how this machine works." Another step forward; he was almost to the computer now. "I can turn off the sirens, cancel the sterilization program."

"How do you know about that?" Jay stepped into the other's path, suspicions raised anew.

"Father told me." Kevin smiled at Jay's expression. "Just a little while ago—when he told me to do whatever you wanted."

What do I do now? Jay was suddenly flooded with conflicting emotions. *Do I trust him?* He looked at the other's face. *He may be my last hope.*

Jay shrugged and stepped aside, allowing the other boy access to the machine. *Hell, how can I not trust him? He's me!*



How nice to see my boys work together! Dr. Caldwell took a moment to watch the scene in his monitor. *They're so much alike physically,* he thought, shaking his head. *It's puzzling that Kevin would develop so quickly skills that Jay could never begin to master.* He shrugged. *Perhaps it's my fault. If I had spent more time teaching Jay and less time studying him, he might well have the same level of abilities.*

The mage touched a control on his master

console, checked the flight path of the incoming helicopters. *The choppers will arrive in thirty minutes or less. I believe that everything will be finished by then.* He glanced at the console. *Of course, I'm still leaving a lot of loose ends. Perhaps I should clean them up?* He shook his head slowly as he turned back to the keyboard. *No. I'll let them take care of themselves.*

He punched in a command code, followed it with a security release. *Kevin can do his part now.* He glanced at the screen that showed the little group in the gym. *And then perhaps I can persuade Colonel Sweet to take care of my friends from Pentex.* He smiled. *He hates them far more than he hates me—he should enjoy the opportunity....*



Jay watched open-mouthed as Kevin's fingers raced over the computer console. At his touch, menus appeared on screen, each accessing various utilities. He browsed utility after utility, until...

"That's looks like it!"

The youngster nodded. "I've got it!" The screen showed fire and emergency alarms, with the control for the 'Alert Siren' flagged as on. Kevin moved the cursor to the appropriate box, pushed the *ENTER* key, and smiled in satisfaction as the box changed from red to orange.

A security prompt appeared.

"Okay." Kevin looked over his shoulder at Jay. "If we can bypass the security code on this thing, we're in." The youngster touched a series of keys, splitting the screen. "Let's see what we can find out." A new menu appeared, opening out into a list of user access codes. "This is interesting...."

"How do you know what you're doing?" Jay was having trouble taking in all the information that appeared on the screen, much less understanding it.

"It's easy." Kevin pointed to the prompts at the top of the screen. "This is a menu-driven system; it's just a matter of finding the proper icon and clicking the mouse on it."

"Forget I asked." Jay turned toward the window, scratching nervously at his ears. "Just get those damn sirens turned off."

"Workin' on it." Kevin touched another icon, watched the scroll of new data. "You know, I can't help but wonder," he began, glancing at Jay, "why did you run away?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"Try me."

"Okay." Jay took a deep breath. "I said before that I don't like being used." He nodded toward the console Kevin was working on. "I found out that Caldwell was experimenting on me." He averted his eyes. "Turning me into a monster."

"A Garou, you mean."

Jay shook his head. "Garou aren't monsters." He looked at his hands. "He made me a fomor—something artificially conceived—half Garou, half..." Jay sighed. "Something else."

"Who told you that?" Kevin's tone was unsurprised. Matter-of-fact.

"Colonel Sweet showed me Caldwell's secret laboratory. My..." He stared at Kevin. "...our mother is down there, floating in some sort of preservative liquid."

"How do you know she's our mother?"

"Colonel..." Jay stopped himself. "Wait a minute, you're trying to tell me..."

"That Colonel Sweet has his own reasons for turning you against our father." Kevin leaned forward, nodded, touched a series of keys.

Jay smiled. *He doesn't see it*, he thought. "And who gave you *that* information?"

"Father told..." Kevin looked at Jay, surprised. "Oh. I never thought about that."

"Besides," Jay turned back toward the window. "Dancing Star also told me that Caldwell used our mother for his experiments."

"Dancing Star?"

"An Uktena Theurge. She appears to me in my dreams."

"Yeah, sure."

"No," Jay turned toward his brother. "Really. If I

knew where her staff ended up, I could show you...."

There was a flash of light from the corner of the room.

Jay froze, not breathing as he stared at the bundle leaning against the wall. *Would he bring it in here?* Jay took a step forward. *Take a chance on what might happen?* He shrugged inwardly. *Of course he would!* *He'd never believe he couldn't control it!* Jay moved quickly to the wrapped bundle. When he touched it he immediately felt the warmth and power flow through him. *It is!* He clawed at the wrapping, pulling the canvas away. *It's the staff!*

"I don't know what you have there," Kevin was looking at him, fear showing plainly in his eyes, "but don't play with it now." He motioned to a screen on the console in front of him. "We're about to have company!"

Jay rushed over for a look. "It's Frawck and his Black Spiral Dancers." He shook his head. "That's bad! And look!" He pointed to the screen. "They have guns. I can't change to Crinos with those sirens going, and unless I do, we don't have a chance!"

"The sirens are no problem." Kevin's fingers raced over the console. "I pulled the access password for their program a couple of minutes ago." He turned toward Jay, shrugged. "It's the sterilization thing I'm having problems with."

The scream of the sirens hesitated, slowed.
Stopped.

Silence filled the compound.

"You work on the timer," Jay headed for the door, shifting as he went. "I'll take care of Frawck and his friends."



"The sirens are off!"

Heidel nodded. "So they are—lights are on again, too." He turned to Aaron. "Shift forms. Let's see if that will heal you."

The Silver Fang nodded, closed his eyes in deep concentration.

"It'll still take some time for him to heal." Eater-of-Bears was already in Crinos. "Wounds from other Garou are nasty."

"I feel fine." Aaron shifted, his coat suddenly a shining white. "See!"

A spot of crimson appeared on his chest.

"It's nothing!" He glared at them. "Just a little cut."

"Aaron." Eater stared him in the eye. "It won't heal unless you give it time."

"After this is over," the Silver Fang held his arms wide, "I promise."

"We need him." Heidel put his arm on the other's shoulder. "If you're sure you can keep up."

Aaron grimaced. "I'll keep up."
Heidel nodded. "Then let's go."



"The sirens are off!"

"Good." Colonel Sweet shifted fluidly. "I've been cooped up in here long enough." He gestured to the others. "C'mon, we've got some Black Spiral Dancers to take care of." From the corner of his eye, he saw Brant start to change. "Not you, Mr. Brant." The other turned to him. "It'll take time for you to heal." He touched the youngster on the shoulder. "You stay here, make sure nobody gets past us. There'll be other fights for you. I promise.

"As for the rest of you," Sweet turned to the remaining Garou, noted that they were all in Crinos and ready for action. He grinned. "Let's go kick some Dancer Ass!"



Frawck and his pack were already inside the office building when the noise stopped.

"They're off!" Dreln g leaned against the wall of the corridor they were in, rubbing the sweat out of his eyes. "Thank Whippoorwill!"

"Don't relax yet." Frawck dropped Nsln to the floor, eyes scanning the hall. "Somebody turned

that thing off. Someone who knows what they're doing."

"The mage!"

Frawck nodded. "And if he's back at the controls of this place, there's no telling what he'll try next." He took Nslin by the shoulders, shook him hard. "Come on!" He slapped him across the face. "I need every claw we've got!"

"What about Lvya and Talnos?" DreIng pulled the last bit of cloth out of his ears, ran his fingernail through them, pulling out bits of thread. "Why don't we go and get them?"

"Because they've been gone too long. They must be dead." Frawck came to his feet, dropping Nslin to the floor. "Just like the rest of us will be if we don't do something about it!"

"Why fight them alone?" DreIng's look was genuinely quizzical. "Isn't the helicopter on the way?"

Frawck nodded and glared at DreIng. "And what kind of welcome will we get back in the nest if we hide and wait for it to arrive and bail us out?"

"Oh." the other Dancer turned away. "I didn't think about that." He made a show of scanning the hallway. "What *are* we going to do?"

"We're going to find out who started those noisemakers." Frawck shifted into Crinos form, fangs gleaming as he checked his claws. "And we're going to tear his heart out!"

D

Jay peeked out into the corridor. The Black Spiral Dancers were at the other end of the hall, only a hundred or so yards away. *Got to keep them away from Kevin.* He tightened his grip on the staff. *Give him time to deactivate the sterilization timer.* He glanced back toward the door of the inner office. *Whatever it is...*

He took another quick look. *They're not moving yet.* He squinted, trying to get a better view. *One of them is down. Probably still groggy from those sirens.* He ducked back into the office. *There's still time for Heidel and the others to get here.* A hard grin crossed his face. *And wouldn't that be a nice surprise for Frawck and his boys....*

D

"Wait... just... a minute." Aaron stopped to lean on the edge of the bleachers, then let himself drop into a seat, one dripping-wet hand pressed hard against the side of his chest. "I need to... catch my breath."

"Eater!" Heidel had been running at half-speed, pacing the injured Garou. "It looks as if the bleeding's getting worse."

"Are there any bubbles?" she called as she turned and trotted back to them. "Little frothy ones?"

Heidel pulled Aaron's hand away from his chest and studied the injury. "I don't think so."

"Good." Eater stopped on the other side of Aaron, still keeping her distance from Heidel's mechanical hand. She peered at the chest wound that was proving so slow to heal. "That means his lung probably isn't punctured."

"I told you I was all right." Aaron pushed Heidel's hand away, groaning slightly with the effort. "I'm just a little weaker than usual." He pushed himself up off the bleachers, stood solidly on his feet. "It'll be okay."

"Maybe you should just stay here," Heidel nodded toward the seats, "rest and wait for us."

"Not a chance!" Aaron snarled at the big cadet, took a step toward the school. "I'm going to finish this fight!" He grinned weakly. "And I'm damn sure not going to let you guys get all the renown."

Heidel sighed. "Are you sure it wouldn't be better if you took a little time..."

"Listen." Aaron's eyes bored into the other Garou. "I'm *not* going to stay behind, no matter *what* you say." He turned toward the dark bulk of Marietta Mil. "Now let's stop arguing about it and get in there." He started forward, limping slightly. "Jay may need us."



"Look!" DreIng pointed up the corridor. "There's someone watching us from that office!"

Damn! Jay took a step back. *They saw me.* He shook his head in disgust, then turned and trotted through the secretarial office to the door of Caldwell's sanctum. "The Black Spiral Dancers are coming." He nodded toward the computer console. "How are you doing with that thing?"

His brother looked up at him, shrugged. "I don't know." He gestured at the screen. "I've found four security subroutines so far, and it takes time to hack around those."

"How long?"

"Worst-case scenario," Kevin grinned, pointed toward the countdown clock just visible on the top of the quartered screen, "we've got thirty-one minutes."

Jay made a face. "Great." He turned back to the door. "I'm going to try to hold them off, but if you hear noises in the outer office," he motioned to the window, "get out of here."

"What about you?"

"Don't worry about me." He brandished the staff, the sigils already glowing faintly. "I've got Dancing Star and the Uktena watching over me."

"Who?"

Jay shook his head, went through the door. "I'll explain later. Just remember to get out if things go sour." He pulled the door closed behind him.

Kevin stared at the blank door panel for a moment, then turned back to the console. "Whatever you say." His grin went hard. "Big brother."

Back in the outer office, Jay scanned the room, options racing through his mind. *The corridor is my best bet. I can keep them from surrounding me, fight them one at a time.* He stopped by the frame of the door. *Maybe I can hold out until Heidel and the others get here.* He took a peek around the edge.

And ducked back as a gunshot rang out.

Damn! He shook his head, grimacing in disgust. *They've got the fomori weapons. That'll change things.* He took another look around, eyes searching for something that might help even the odds, but found nothing. There were noises in the corridor. *Footsteps! They're moving up. They'll be here in a second.* He slammed the outer door, snapped the lock on. *I'll have to try to hold them here, stop them from coming through.* His face turned grim. *If I can...*



"You fool!" Frawck slapped the rifle out of Jmsyn's hand. "Now he knows we have the guns!"

"So what?" The Dancer stared at his leader. "There's nothing he can do about it."

Frawck glared at his packmate. "Idiot! If it's the

mage, there's a lot he can do about it!" He gestured at the fallen weapon. "He can make that thing blow up in your hand!"

"I didn't think of that." Jmsyn's face fell. "Besides, I don't think that was the mage. It looked like that cub you brought back." He looked up at Frawck. "You know, the one you locked up in the gym with the big Shadow Lord."

"Jay?" Frawck looked back down the hall. "Maybe it was the brother, Kevin." The Spiral Dancer nodded. "Yes, that's possible." He kicked the rifle back to Jmsyn. "Maybe we should find out."

"How about Nslin?" Drelnng indicated the still-unconscious figure. "What do we do with him?"

"Leave him there." Frawck picked up his own rifle. "He's no good to us until he comes to. We can pick him up later, when the helicopter gets here."

Drelnng nodded and stood, stretching carefully in the somewhat confined space of the corridor.

"Get your gun."

The Dancer shook his head. "No, I don't want it."

Frawck growled at him. "I told you to take it!"

"Listen," Drelnng pulled himself to his full height, less than an inch shorter than the Black Spiral Dancer pack leader. "If it's only one of the cubs in that room, we don't need guns." He looked Frawck

squarely in the eye, challenging him. "If it isn't—if it is the mage—we don't want them."

Frawck brought his hand back, ready to cuff the recalcitrant Garou, then thought about what the other had said. "You know," he said, his snarl turning into a grin, "I think you're right!" He nodded. "We *don't* want the guns." He leaned over, rested his own rifle against the wall. "Jmsyn," he gestured to the other Dancer, "go ahead, put it down."

"But Frawck..."

"No," the tall Dancer smiled. "DreIng's right about this." The smile widened. "And I'm going to let him get the renown for it." He waved down the hall, toward the mage's door. "I'm going to let him go first."

"Are you actually afraid of a cub?" DreIng snorted at him and started moving down the hallway, keeping as close to the wall as possible, moving as silently as the scuffed linoleum flooring allowed. He was almost at the door when it slammed shut, a series of clicks telling the three Dancers that it was now locked. "Do you still think it's the mage?" DreIng called back to the pack leader.

"No." Frawck's smile was predatory now. "It's the cub." He strolled up the hall, passed DreIng, and positioned himself to kick the door in. "Shall we pay him a visit?"

Colonel Sweet pushed gently on the side door of the office building. He and his pack had come out of the Field House just in time to see the four remaining Black Spiral Dancers slink into the brick building, and, knowing that the Dancers had guns loaded with silver ammunition, Sweet had decided it would be safest to bring his pack all the way around the building and come at the foe from an unexpected direction. *At least, he told himself, I hope it's unexpected!*

Now that they were finally in position, he used his most delicate touch to open the door a hair, hoping that the hinges had been oiled recently.

They had. The door opened silently, allowing Sweet to peer through. *Okay! The Black Spirals were there, perhaps halfway up the hall, two of them hugging the wall, the third standing in front of a door. What are they doing? Do they think that we're...?* Then he realized where they were. *That's Caldwell's door.* The Shadow Lord furrowed his brow as he tried to understand what was happening. *Is the mage in there? Are they trying to capture him?*

Sweet watched as the tallest of the Dancers—*Frawck*, he realized—kicked the door open, then stood back while another leaped through the

opening. *He doesn't take any chances!* The Colonel smiled. *But this time, he's made a bad decision!* He shoved the door hard, letting it bang against the wall. *It's time for him to find out who's really in charge here!*

Colonel Sweet leaped into the hallway.



Jay barely had time to get into position when the door slammed open. A dark shape burst through, bellowing an atonal cry to Whippoorwill as it leaped for Jay's throat.

Stupid! Jay stepped forward and swept his staff up and into the chest of the onrushing Garou. There was a flash of power, and the Black Spiral Dancer collapsed into a boneless heap on the floor.

Jay turned back toward the door—*There!* The tall shape of Frawck was visible, standing directly in front of the opening. Jay started to move forward, but he didn't get far when suddenly there was another sound in the hallway outside, and the Spiral Dancer disappeared, flowing to his right with amazing speed.

Jay shook his head, wondering what had happened—and screamed as his whole side erupted with pain. He staggered back, turning in time to see his foe dive forward, holding a silver letter-opener

in a trembling hand, the blunt end aimed at Jay's chest.

Jay sidestepped the attack, brought the butt of the staff down and around, and smashed at the hand of his Dancer foe. The other Garou howled, dropped the burning weapon, and whirled on Jay, frenzying.

He's lost it! Jay realized, ducking a wild slash, then another. Jay tried to bring the staff up to parry, but the Dancer was too close—he lunged past the weapon, intent on getting his fangs into Jay's body. Jay was forced to drop his staff, meet the attack with fang and claw.

Instantly, the two Garou were chest to chest, ripping at one another with claws, tearing flesh with fangs. Jay felt the Dancer's teeth reach for his throat. He pushed them away, forced the other's head back. For a second, he had the advantage of leverage, but then the Dancer erupted in another frenzied attack and broke free.

Jay was panting now, dripping from a number of small cuts. He knew that this was to the death, that he had to kill this Black Spiral Dancer or be killed himself. He howled his defiance, and, as his opponent leaped toward him, Jay surged to meet him, slashing at the other's unprotected belly while ducking away from the Dancer's attack. Jay's claws ripped through fur and muscle, opening a huge wound in the Dancer's stomach.

Intestines spilled, steaming, to the floor.

That ought to slow him down! Jay whirled, ready to leap onto his opponent's back and finish the fight—but he was too slow. The Dancer, not troubled in the least by his massive wound, was already in Jay's face, teeth snapping at eyes and throat.

Jay backed away from the attack, his feet slipping in the gore that now covered the floor. *Can't fall now!* His foot touched Dancing Star's staff, but he realized that he couldn't bend over to pick it up—the Spiral Dancer was still driving forward, single-mindedly raging toward Jay's jugular. *Got to finish this!* He slashed at the other's eyes, felt his talons tear across one, ripping the delicate membrane. *There!* Again Jay took a step back, waited for his opponent to give him an opening.

It came an instant later. The Dancer, his depth perception gone, took a bad step, his foot coming down on Jay's staff. Again lightning flashed, this time crisping the frenzied Garou's foot. The Dancer fell to his knee, unable to stand.

Now! Jay leaped forward, slashed with his right hand, felt blood spurt, pivoted, slashed again. His opponent howled in defiance and pain, tried desperately to regain his feet—but he had taken too much damage. The Black Spiral Dancer fell to his side, the strength draining from his body with each beat of his heart.

Jay picked up his staff, stepped carefully forward, and smashed the butt end into the skull of his opponent.

The Spiral Dancer stopped moving.

Panting, Jay fell back against the wall. *And I was going to hold the hallway against four of them!* He looked toward the doorway. *What happened to the others, anyway?* He staggered forward, using the staff now as a crutch. *I'd better find out.*



Frawck turned to his right as a loud crash reverberated through the hall. "You!"

Colonel Sweet bounded through the door, teeth gleaming in the bright overhead lighting. "So." His smile grew wider. "If it isn't the new commandant of the Corps of Cadets."

Frawck moved toward the new danger, hurrying away from the doorway, unwilling to expose himself to the double threat of Colonel Sweet and whoever was inside Caldwell's office. "How did you get free?"

Sweet edged forward, moving on the balls of his feet, body poised and ready. "You'd have to ask your own people about that." Another gleam of teeth. "Although I think you'd have trouble gettin' an answer."

Frawck nodded. "Yes. I assumed such was the case." He stood tall, the top of his head nearly

brushing the corridor ceiling. "Shall we do this honorably?"

"Certainly." Sweet also straightened—the top of his head pressed tight against the acoustic tiles of the ceiling, lifting them slightly. "That is, if you know the meanin' of the word!"

"Oh, I do." He turned to the side. "Jmsyn, you will stay out of this. And if..." he inclined his head toward the Colonel, "...he wins, you will do whatever he says."

"Very nice." Sweet motioned his remaining cadets forward. "Gentlemen, keep an eye on Mr.... Jmsyn, is it?" Frawck nodded. "...Mr. Jmsyn. Make sure he doesn't become too excited."

"Any place special you want to do this?"

Sweet's grin became wider still. "I don't see any reason to move outside." He gestured around him. "This will do just fine."

"Weapons?"

The Colonel held up his hands. "Tooth and nail."

"How primitive," Frawck shrugged. "But, if that's the way you want it..." He turned to the side, as if about to say something else to Jmsyn, then suddenly sprang at the relaxed Sweet, howling a prayer to Whippoorwill.



Jay reached the door just as the fight started. So, *Colonel Sweet has finally arrived!* He witnessed Frawck's lightning-fast attack, and Sweet's equally quick parry. He settled in to watch, but then thought better of it. *Should I try to get all the human kids out of here?* Jay looked around, saw that the hallway was blocked. *Don't see how I can.* He grinned. *Besides, this looks interesting.*



Heidel and the rest of Jay's pack reached the building just as the fight started. One of the cadets—*Goldberg, I think*—stopped them from entering, gesturing toward the two combatants.

"This is to be an honorable combat," he told them. "Just the Colonel and the Spiral Dancer leader."

"Where is the rest of Frawck's pack?" Heidel's eyes searched the shadows, looking for more of the Black Spiral Dancers.

"There's someone named Jmsyn—God, these guys have weird names!—standing over there, next to Terry and Jennings. The rest are scattered around the grounds." Goldberg's smile widened. "Dead."

Heidel nodded, motioned to Eater-of-Bears and Aaron to join him. "I guess it's all over." He pointed

at the two Garou locked in combat. "All that's left is Frawck there, and he's up against Colonel Sweet."

"What do we do if Sweet doesn't win?" Aaron's question seemed to come from nowhere.

Heidel turned a puzzled look on the Silver Fang. "Why shouldn't he?"

"Look, I know this Sweet is your surrogate father." The white-furred Garou rubbed at one of his still-bleeding wounds. "But Black Spiral Dancers are tough—and tricky." He shook his head. "Never take anything for granted with them."

"He's right," Eater-of-Bears agreed. "Frawck might still have something up his sleeve." She looked around. "Where is Jay No-Name?"

Heidel glanced at the faces around him, surprised by the question. "I don't know." He peered into the building, trying to see past the combatants. "I guess he's still in the building—in one of the offices...."

"We can't smell him through this human stench." Eater wrinkled her nostrils. "Is there any other way to find out without walking through..." the Red Talon indicated the fight raging in the hall, "...that?"

"We could check the windows," Heidel suggested, "but some of them are frosted, or painted over. And I'd like to stick around to see how this comes out."

"We understand." Aaron touched the Red Talon on the shoulder, pulling her along. "Eater and I will go take a look; you keep an eye on the fight."

"Thanks," Heidel nodded to his packmates.

"We'll holler if we need help." Aaron moved away, still limping slightly.



Nslin floated slowly back to consciousness, called by the ululating battle cry of Whippoorwill. His eyes snapped open even as his mind cringed away from the shattering noise of the sirens. *Nooooo!*

But there was no pain; the ear-splitting din was gone. *It's quiet!* Nslin slowly allowed his mind to open to his surroundings. *The sirens are off!* There was a loud snarl in front of him, then a louder cry of pain. *Where am I?* He started to sit up, but stopped all movement when incredible pain stabbed through his head. *What happened to me?*

Again there was a cry in front of him, closer now. *What's going on?* He forced his eyes open, fighting the pain—and saw Frawck fighting for his life with another, larger, Garou. *Is he all alone?* Nslin searched the hallway for the other Spiral Dancers. *Where's Jmsyn? Dreln?* He started to pull himself upright, leaning his back against the corridor wall for leverage, biting his lips against the continuing

pain. *I've got to do something!* He looked around. *But what?*

Then he saw the small pile of weapons. Guns. He reached out a hand, touched the barrel of an AK-47. *With silver bullets.* He pulled the rifle toward him. Yes, *that might help....*



Frawck was shocked by Colonel Sweet's power. *By the Wyrn!* He thought as his first attack was beaten back with practiced ease. *What have I gotten myself into?* He snarled, whirling toward the black-furred Garou, claws whistling in a double-handed slash.

He was met with equal savagery, his attack blunted. Sweet's own claws were in his face, tearing toward his eye, slashing into his cheek....

"Aarrgh!" Frawck staggered back, hand going to the burning wound on his face. "Silver!" He glared at the Colonel. "You're using silver!"

Sweet shrugged. "Tooth and nail." He held his artificial hand up, let it glint in the light. "This is a part of me." His face split into a sinister grin. "Or didn't you realize that?"

Frawck backed away, circled. *I've got to find a way to beat him.* He allowed his concentration to slide, just for a millisecond, past the looming body of the Colonel and out the door. There was a line of light

on the horizon. *It's almost sunrise.* Involuntarily, his ears twitched forward, straining for a sound that wasn't there. *The helicopter will be here soon.* He snarled, half to himself. *I can't lose now!* Again he flung himself at Sweet, this time feinting high with his claws, prepared to sweep under the other Garou's block and slash through Sweet's Achilles tendon. *Then I'll have him!*

It didn't work. Colonel Sweet ignored the feint, grabbing at Frawck's arms, sweeping the Spiral Dancer's body into a tight arc, slamming his head against the wall. Plaster powdered under the force of the blow.

No good! Frawck tried to shake away the grogginess he felt even as he scrambled away from Sweet's follow-up attack, managing to escape with nothing more than a slashed leg. *No good at all!* Anger flooded through the pack leader. *He can't beat me! I'm Frawck! I'm the best!*

Frawck leaped forward—no finesse left, just power, driving straight at his opponent's face, claws scrabbling for vulnerable spots. *The best!*

Colonel Sweet turned the attack aside with embarrassing ease, fending off Frawck's claws with a sweep of his metallic forearm, following that with a sweeping slash across the Spiral Dancer's shoulder, severing the muscle, leaving Frawck's right arm hanging uselessly by his side.

The Spiral Dancer whirled in place, his pain

forgotten, humiliation flooding his brain with rage. Again he attacked, fangs slavering as he tried desperately to close them on some part of Sweet's anatomy.

But it was not to be. Again the big officer sidestepped the Spiral Dancer's charge, again silvery claws swept across flesh. Frawck's left leg collapsed, his legs no longer able to support him. The tall Dancer hit the floor hard, sliding into the wall, shaking more plaster loose.

Colonel Sweet followed his foe, prepared to administer the coup de grace, and finish the fight.

No! Frawck struggled upright, bracing himself against the corridor wall. *I won't be beaten! Can't be beaten!* Rage filled him, reddening his vision, sweeping away all conscious thought. For an instant, the animal that had been Frawck leaned forward, ready to attack its opponent with every ounce of strength that remained to it.

Then the moment passed. Frawck, pack leader of the Black Spiral Dancers, now nothing more than an animal caught in blind, mindless frenzy, turned and ran.



Nslin had just managed to pull the rifle into his hands when the fight ended. "He's gone Fox!" he

heard, then looked up to see Frawck rushing toward him at an all-out run, giving no thought to either offense or defense. Nslin noted that the pack leader's eyes were pure white, his pupils rolled back in panic.

He's gone into frenzy, Nslin realized. He saw the big Garou, the one called Sweet, in hot pursuit, only a few yards behind. *He'll catch Frawck before he can get out the door!* Nslin raised the AK-47 to his shoulder, pushed the selector switch to full automatic. *I've got to help him.*

He squeezed the trigger.



"He's gone Fox!" Heidel yelled, leaping past Goldberg into the corridors.

"Yeah!" Goldberg's grin filled his face. "I guess that means the Colonel wins." He turned toward Terry and Jennings, pointed to Jmsyn. "Keep an eye on that one until the Colonel tells us what he wants to..."

"Look!" Heidel pointed toward the end of the hall. "There's somebody down there!"

"Can't be!" Goldberg squinted in the direction Heidel was pointing. "There's nobody left."

"There!" They both saw the glint of metal. "And he's got a gun!" Heidel leaped forward. "Colonel Sweet! Look out!"

The hallway erupted with the sound of the rifle firing, three, four, five times.

"Colonel Sweet!" Heidel raced down the corridor.

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"What the hell is going on out there?" Kevin burst out of the inner office, his eyes frightened.

"I don't know!" Jay shot back over his shoulder, stepping cautiously into the hall. "Stay there! I'll be right back!" Jay looked to his right, saw Colonel Sweet falling, and, beyond him, Frawck running as fast as he could, heading straight for the door. *What the hell?! He took another step—and was almost bowled over as another huge figure flashed by. Heidel! You did make it!* He watched his friend race toward the Colonel, then the sound of gunfire filled the hallway again.

Somebody's got a gun! Jay ducked as bullets stitched into the ceiling over his head. He saw Heidel stagger, then catch himself, take another step toward the supine form of the Colonel. *Art's hit!* Jay raced down the hall, zigzagging to make himself a more difficult target. *There he is!* A Garou was leaning against the wall nearest the door, an AK-47 in his hands. *That must be the one doing the shooting!*

In front of the huddled Dancer, Jay could see

Frawck, nearly at the door now, head down, running full out. Jay put on a burst of speed—got to reach him before he gets away!

Then Frawck smashed into the other Garou, flailing at him with mindless slashes of his claws. *It's the frenzy, Jay realized. He doesn't know who it is—just someone between him and the outside!* Jay watched as the Garou against the wall dropped the gun, trying desperately to protect his face and throat against the other's random attack. Blood spurted. *He doesn't have a chance!* Jay was almost there. He raced past the huddled forms of Heidel and the Colonel—I hope Art's all right!—and slid to a stop right in front of the door, turning to meet the frenzied Spiral Dancer. *Get past me, you bastard!*

Frawck tried. It had taken a second to claw his way through the mangled body of Nslin, but now he leaped toward Jay, determined to get through the door to the safety of the outside world.

He met the staff of Dancing Star.

Jay, the weapon now almost a part of him, used the weighted end to smash into the snarling face of his opponent. Teeth shattered, falling to the floor, but that didn't slow the maddened Garou down; rather, he redoubled his attack, trying to claw his way through this last barrier to freedom.

Jay stood his ground, using the staff to parry the other's mindless flailing. He shuddered as burst after burst of power flowed through the fetish,

burning Frawck's flesh even as it blunted his attack. *I've got to end this*, Jay told himself, gagging as the smell of Frawck's burned and blistered flesh filled his nostrils.

Jay pushed his opponent away, took a half-step forward, using the momentum of that step to fend off the Spiral Dancer's final desperate assault. Then, with all his strength, Jay slammed the end of the staff into the insane Garou's skull.

There was a loud *crunch* as bone shattered, then a bright flash of light as one last surge of power flooded the hapless Garou's body.

Then it was over. Frawck fell to the floor, eyes blank and dead, brain baked in the cauldron of his skull. *Thank God!* Jay stared at the fallen Dancer for a moment, then looked up the corridor, searching for Heidel and the Colonel.

Both lay motionless on the floor.

"Art!" Jay ran to the side of his friend, stopping as he saw the pool of blood that had already accumulated on the floor.

"Jay?" Heidel looked up, his eyes full of pain. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Art." Jay took his friend's hand, glancing around, hopelessly, for help. "Just lie still."

"The Colonel?"

Jay spared a glance for Colonel Sweet—he could hear the big Garou's heavy, labored breathing, "I don't know...."

Heidel tried to get his feet under him. Failed.
"You've got to save him, Jay."

"Okay, Art. Okay." Jay pushed his friend down.
"You just lie there and take it easy." He touched Heidel's shoulder, giving what he hoped was a reassuring squeeze. "I'll go see how the Colonel is."

Heidel nodded, smiled, let himself relax.
"Thanks."

Jay crawled the few feet to Colonel Sweet's side. He grabbed the big Garou by the shoulder, rolled him onto his back.

"The wounds don't look too bad." Eater-of-Bears had started running the instant she heard the shots. She'd reached the door mere seconds after Jay finished Frawck, then had to push the Dancer's body out of the way to allow herself entry. "The first one grazed him just over the ear." She kneeled down, wiping already-clotting blood away. "The impact must have knocked him unconscious." Sweet's breathing slowed, then smoothed out. "The second one hit here," she pointed to a wound on his chest, ran her fingers over his shoulder to his back. "Went straight through. It might have punctured a lung, but as long as the bullet came out, there's no real problem."

"Did you hear that, Art?" Jay turned back to his friend. "Colonel Sweet's gonna be all right."

"That's good." Heidel tried to smile, but failed.

"He's an honorable Garou—like you." He reached up, caught Jay by the arm. "A good..." He coughed, the life slipping from his eyes. "...friend..." His hand slipped away.

"Art?" Jay grabbed his friend by the shoulders, shook him. "Art!" He raised his head, howled in anguish. "Noooooooooooo!"

"Jay!" A hand grabbed at him; Jay brushed it off. "Jay! I need you!"

"Go away." Jay's eyes were full of tears, blind to the outside world.

"No!" the hand grabbed him again, spun him around. "There's no time!"

"Kevin?" Jay stared at the face so like his own. "No time for what?"

"The timer, Jay." Kevin shook his head. "I can't turn it off!"

Jay shrugged. "So?" He gestured at the bodies on the floor all around him. "There's nothing to keep us here now."

"You don't understand." Kevin yanked at his brother, trying to pull him to his feet. "The timer won't hurt the school."

Jay's eyes, still unfocused, turned toward his brother. "What does it do?"

"It sterilizes the containment facility."

Jay came to his feet, his expression still one of confusion and pain. Kevin pulled at him, trying to

move him away from Heidel and the Colonel. "Down below." He pointed toward the floor. "You were there—the place with all the tubes and equipment."

"Where the bodies are."

Kevin nodded. "Yeah! That's it!"

Jay's mind filled with the image of his mother, floating helplessly in a metal tank. *I've got to save her!* he thought, looking at the peaceful face of Heidel. *I can't lose both of them in one day!* "Come on." Jay's eyes turned fiery, charged with determination. "We've got to save our mother!" He looked at Kevin. "How much time do we have?"

"Thirteen minutes!"

"Let's go!" He turned to his companions. "Eater! Take care of Sweet—and get Art outside so we can give him a proper burial."

"Where are you going?"

Jay started for the door, just behind his brother. "I'm going to get my mother!"



Dr. Caldwell stared at his consoles in satisfaction. It was all turning out perfectly! He checked the radar screen. *The chopper is right on time.* He smiled as he watched it approach. *With luck, Pentex sent enough muscle to finish off all the Garou left in this*

place. His smile widened. *That is, all except the ones I want to take with me.*

He turned to the second screen. *Kevin's done a pretty good job. I'll have to think of a way to reward him. He made a note in his pad. Too bad I didn't use the same genetic mix for Jay.* The mage shrugged. *Ah well, too late to worry about that now.* He stared at the far screen. *It's time I got ready to welcome the boys. He smiled. Wouldn't want to be a thoughtless father...*



Jmsyn waited for his chance. He'd watched the whole fight between Sweet and Frawck, seen his pack leader frenzy and run. *He killed Nslin!* Jmsyn knew that Frawck wasn't really to blame, knew that in his frenzied state he'd had no choice. *But he did have a choice of whether to fight or not!* The Dancer suppressed a snarl of anger. *And whether to turn me over to these bastards!*

The Garou guards were still watching him closely, though it was clear that they'd rather be helping the others with the burial arrangements. *At least we got one of the homids!* He watched as they carried Colonel Sweet out and began to treat his wounds. *And maybe the big one will die too.* A sly smile crossed Jmsyn's lips. *Maybe I can help speed that along....*

Jay and Kevin sidestepped the carnage outside the office building and headed for the Field House. "How do you know the sterilization is targeted for the holding area?" Jay called over his shoulder.

"I broke into their security files while I was looking for the disarm code." Kevin was loping just behind Jay. "There was a list of arming codes and their targets," he shrugged. "But no information on how to disarm."

"Caldwell probably has that memorized." Jay reached the main doors, raced in. "I wish we knew where he was."

"Probably already long gone."

Jay shook his head. "I don't think so." He turned down the side corridor in the direction of the gym, hurtling right past Brant, who was watching from the shadows. "I can't believe he'd just leave all his equipment and files behind."

"Perhaps that's what the sterilization is supposed to take care of."

"Maybe." Jay raced across the basketball court, went into the seniors' locker room. "We'll know in a minute." He reached the far wall, found the door that Colonel Sweet had shown him. "The entrance is right here." Jay grabbed the knob, turned.

"Damn!" He yanked at the unyielding oval. "It's locked!"

"Let me see that." Kevin studied the lock, an electronic model with a keypad attached. "Let's see...." He touched a series of numbers, pressed the pound sign, and...

The door opened.

"Where'd you learn to do that?" Jay asked in surprise.

"I've always known how," Kevin shrugged. "Now c'mon. Are we going in, or not?"

Jay took a deep breath. "We're going in there."

Neither of them heard Brant padding up behind them.



"Listen." Eater-of-Bears glanced at the lightening eastern sky. "That sounds like a helicopter." She cocked her head, judging the intensity of the sound. "It's coming this way."

"I think you're right." Aaron squinted into the sun, tried to distinguish the shape. "It's still too far away to be sure."

"Could be the police," said Goldberg. "With all the commotion last night, the Colonel figured somebody would call them."

Terry looked up at the sky. "What do we do?"

Goldberg shrugged. "Wait, I guess. If it is the police, they won't see us—the Delirium will take care of that."

"But we'd better be ready just in case it isn't." Aaron glanced around the area of the campus. "Whoever it is, they'll have to land over there." He pointed to the open area in the middle of the running track. "A couple of us can hide out under the bleachers, keep an eye on things. Everyone else..." He glanced back at the quadrangle. "I guess it would probably be safest in the Field House."

"I'd hate to be caught inside that thing." Eater-of-Bears shuddered.

"Me too," Aaron shrugged. "But I'm not going to leave Jay behind."

"Neither am I."

"The Field House it is, then." He gestured to the cadets. "You guys get the Colonel and that Dancer inside. We'll hole up out here."

"Hey!" Goldberg glared at the white-furred outsider. "Who made you boss?!"

"Just *do* it." Aaron glared at the other Garou, and then allowed the glare to dissolve into a grin. "We can argue about who's in charge when this is over."

Goldberg's fur bristled, but he nodded and moved off, muttering to himself. "Goddamn rustic know-it-alls!"

Aaron shook his head. "Jerk."

Eater-of-Bears put her hand on the Silver Fang's shoulder. "You handled that very well."

"We just don't have time to fight right now." Aaron pointed to the horizon. "That helicopter is getting closer, and I just don't believe that its occupants are friendly."

Eater nodded. "Neither do I."

Aaron headed for the track. "C'mon. Let's see what kind of cover there is."

"Right behind you."

The two Garou trotted out of the quadrangle, heading for the track.



The room was almost exactly as Jay remembered it—except for one thing. *I don't hear any noises.* Jay turned his head from side to side as he stepped slowly into the cavernous space. *The last time I was here, there was a lot of noise.*

He glanced around, his eyes searching for the power panels and cabinets that had covered the wall. *There they are.* He stared at the string of metallic shapes. *But they're quiet—they must be turned off!* He stood still and let his eyes quest all around the darkened room.

"Something's wrong," he muttered to Kevin.

"No. Not really." Suddenly the power came on,

flooding the room with bright light, revealing a suited figure amiably smiling at Jay from a catwalk on the far end of the room. "Everything is just fine."

"Caldwell!" Jay assumed a fighting stance, his staff held across his body.

"No, son. You don't have to fight me, or anyone else." Caldwell gestured around the room. "There's nothing left here to fight *for*!"

Jay saw that it was true. The glass cabinets were gone, the only evidence of their existence the scarred segments of floor, highlighted by loose strands of fiber-optic cable. The remaining support machinery had either been removed or pushed to the sides of the room. The big central area was now empty save for the wiring and a few puddles of glowing green liquid.

"Where's my mother?"

"Your mother?" The scientist smiled. "What makes you think she was ever here?"

"Don't play games with me. I *know* you had her here." He glared at the mage, took a step forward. "What have you done with her?"

"Oh dear." Caldwell shook his head. "I see you're determined to be pugnacious." His smile widened. "Fortunately, I prepared for this." He motioned. "Isn't that right?"

"That's right." Kevin stepped in front of Jay. "I won't let you hurt him."

"But you're my brother!" Jay looked at the other in surprise. "Closer than that. You're *me!*"

"Don't forget the improvements!" Caldwell's voice was smug. "I don't think you should try to get past him." The mage gestured. "In fact, you'd be doing us all a favor if you'd just come along quietly."

"Come along to where?" Jay started to circle, eyes fixed on the unmoving form of his supposed brother. *What do I do? I can't fight him!* His mother's image floated across his vision. *But I can't abandon her either....*

"As we speak, a pair of Pentex Inc. helicopters are landing out on the athletic field." The scientist whisked a spot of dust off his jacket. "They carry two fully equipped action teams."

"Colonel Sweet will handle them."

"While he's unconscious?" The mage shook his head sadly. "I don't think so. In any case, while these teams are..." He gestured broadly. "...occupied, we will have a window of opportunity to take their transportation and move on."

"I won't let you."

Caldwell shrugged. "You really have no choice." He looked down at the still-unmoving figure. "Kevin?"

Immediately, Kevin sprang forward, leaping onto Jay, forcing him back against the wall. *He's stronger than I am!* Jay realized instantly. The staff clattered

to the floor, dashed from Jay's hands with one blow.
How do I fight him?

Dr. Caldwell laughed triumphantly.



Eater-of-Bears and Aaron watched as the helicopters cleared the treeline and prepared to land.

"Those aren't police."

"No." Aaron shook his head. "Looks like more of Pentex's troops." He pointed, carefully keeping under cover. "Look at the one sitting next to the pilot."

Eater turned in the direction the Silver Fang was pointing, saw a bulky figure filling one seat in the big Huey to overflowing. "That's a fomor!"

Aaron nodded. "Just like Frawck's gang."

"Well, we were expecting something like that."

"Not that many." The white-furred Garou was counting heads in the two machines. "There must be twenty pieces of Wyrn-meat out there."

"What do we do?"

"There's no way the two of us can do anything alone." Aaron glanced at the sun, now just above the horizon. "We've got to get back to Jay and the others."

"How?" Eater motioned toward the first helicopter, already landing. "They'll see us."

"Not necessarily." Aaron glanced at the shadows the bleachers cast across the field. After the second chopper touches down, we can slip away in the shadows."

"That might work."

"It'd better." He gave her a grim look. "It's the only chance we've got!"



Jmsyn stared through the glass of the Field House door as the first helicopter flew over. *Yes! He exulted. They're ours!* He noted the type. *UH1-C's.* That meant six to eight troops per chopper. *Sixteen against these pitiful curs!* He suppressed a smile. Victory was certain now. *It'll be easier if I can get away. That way I can brief the team leader on how many are here and where they're located.* He glanced at the young Garou between him and the door, gauging their readiness. *These three are more concerned about their leader than they are with me.* He shifted position, pulling his feet under him, ready to make a break. *This'll be easy!* He waited for the second chopper to go over. *The noise'll distract them....*

The sound of rotors approached, growing louder, louder...

Now! Jmsyn sprang forward—and fell flat on his face. *What in the hell?!* Something had an iron grip

on his leg. He twisted, claws ready to rend whatever was holding him...

And found himself face-to-face with an angry Colonel Sweet.

"Goin' somewhere?" The big Garou's teeth glinted as he tightened his grip on Jmsyn's ankle. "I thought you had agreed to do the..." Sweet smiled. "...*honorable* thing."

Jmsyn felt tendons snap, ligaments tear. The pain was growing by the second. He gritted his teeth, fought to hold back a scream as he tried to explain. "I... I thought..."

"You thought I was still unconscious." Sweet tightened his grip again. Bones touch and grated under his fingers. "You thought you'd be able to get away, show your friends where we were."

"I..." Jmsyn wasn't thinking clearly now. "I just..." He screamed as the ankle bone shattered, crushed and splintered in the iron grasp of Sweet's claws.

"Ah, I seem to have hurt you." The Colonel's face changed, grew angry. "But not as much as I plan to!"

"Sir!" Goldberg touched Colonel Sweet on the shoulder. "There's no time for that now!"

"No time?" Sweet dropped the crushed remnant of the Spiral Dancer's leg. "Perhaps you're right." He reached out, grabbed a fistful of the hair on top of Jmsyn's head, and pulled. "I shouldn't be wastin'

my energy on this..." he pulled harder, tendons appearing under the fur of his neck, "...thing!"

Suddenly, his other hand snapped through the air; silver talons, five inches long, flashed through taut skin and muscle. Jmsyn's head came free, blood spurting widely.

"There!" The Colonel smiled, glanced at the head he still held, bobbing wildly from its still-intact knot of hair. "Now we don't have to worry about him anymore." He turned to the goggling cadet, casually tossing what was left of Jmsyn aside. "Mr. Goldberg—why don't you brief me on the current situation."



Deep in the bowels of the Field House, Jay fought a silent, desperate battle, trying with all his power to get a hand free, to push his brother away.

"You can't do it." Caldwell shook his head as he watched the uneven battle. "I gave him reinforced bone structure and added endorphins to cut muscular fatigue, increase endurance."

"If he's so good," Jay yelled past his opponent's grin, "why do you want *me*?"

"A good question." The mage smiled. "And you deserve an answer!" He stroked his beard absently. "When I bred your line, I did so to test various combinations of shapeshifting characteristics."

"My line?" Jay was panting now, still trying to break free of his opponent.

"Surely," Caldwell said, wrinkling his brow, "you didn't think you were the first, did you?" He shook his head. "Oh, no. There was Adam, Bart, Charles..."

"Alphabetical names?"

"Why not?" The scientist beamed at the helpless Jay. "After all, why should I make things difficult for myself?"

"That means I'm..." Jay hesitated for an instant, then tried to dip his shoulder under Kevin's grasp, pull him over and past.

It didn't work.

"Number ten." Caldwell nodded. "I had high hopes for you. Your preliminary tests were quite extraordinary, and when you managed to make the Garou shift out there on the road..."

"You arranged that!"

"Of course!" The mage held up his hands. "I *had* to be sure that the Garou gene, at least, had bred true."

Jay suddenly relaxed, allowing himself to go limp in Kevin's grasp. *There's no way I can break away.* He looked around, saw the staff on the floor just to one side. *Maybe if I can keep him talking...* "So I can shift. Kevin can too."

"Yes." Caldwell beamed at Jay's brother. "He does

that quite well—it's the other part of the experiment that he's deficient in."

"Other part?" Jay shifted his weight slightly, let himself slide to one side.

"Come, come, Jay!" The mage shook his head in mock dismay. "You must know what I'm talking about—all my tests indicate that you're quite capable of the Bastet configuration."

Jay slid another inch. "Bastet?"

"A big cat!" Caldwell leaned forward, staring into Jay's face. "I'm sure you've done it by now! Turned into a tiger, perhaps, or a panther."

Jay shook his head. "I'm Garou! Not some damn cat!"

"We'll see." He turned, headed for the doorway just behind him. "I'll be able to run some more tests when we get to the new lab." He smiled. "Then we'll be able to see what the Bastet genes gave you." He motioned to Kevin. "Bring him."

Kevin half-turned, grip still locked on his brother's arm—and Jay exploded into an all-out attack. He brought his knee up—*sorry, brother!*—smashing it into the groin of his opponent, ready to follow with a double-handed slash across the face.

But Kevin never reacted to the kick, merely grunted and pulled Jay to one side, forcing him off-balance.

"Oh." Dr. Caldwell grinned down at the sudden

flurry of activity. "I guess you didn't completely understand me. Those endorphins I spoke of also make Kevin quite insensitive to pain."

The younger Garou dragged Jay toward the exit doors.



I don't believe it! Brant kept to the shadows, watching as Kevin pulled Jay across the big laboratory floor. *Nobody is that strong! Not even the Colonel!* He looked around desperately, trying to decide what to do. *If I run back to call the others, Jay might be gone before we can get back! If I try to fight...* He looked down at his still-useless arm. ...*No, that won't work at all.*

There had to be something else. Brant scanned the lab, searching for a phone, an intercom—something he could use to call for help.

Then he saw it.

The staff! It was lying on the floor, just a few steps away from the point where the fight between Jay and Kevin had started. *That might do the trick!* Brant checked the positions of the others. Yes, they were far enough away. *I've got to be careful.* He slipped away from the entrance, moved soundlessly across the empty floor. *Just a few more steps...* Then he was standing over it, looking down at the length of wood that held so much power. *Should I pick it up?*

He glanced over the sigils. *None of them are glowing.*
He reached down, touched the wood. *Feels okay...*

"Hey!" came Dr. Caldwell's voice from behind him. "Who are you?! Don't touch that!"

Brant took a deep breath—*here goes nothing!*—and picked up the Staff of Dancing Star.



"They're Pentex!" Aaron and Eater-of-Bears slid to a halt just inside the doors of the Field House. "Two helicopters full!" Aaron noted that Colonel Sweet was awake and on his feet, cleaning his silver arm with a bit of cloth. "Glad to see you recovering."

"Thank you." The Shadow Lord kept working, rubbing bits of dried blood from the tiny scales that covered his mechanical hand. "Were the choppers loaded with Garou or fomori?"

"Seemed like a load of fomori." Aaron saw something odd in the corner, took a step toward it. "We didn't stay to be sure."

"Probably wise." Sweet rubbed at his jaw, letting his claws scratch the tough hide. "That means between fourteen and sixteen troops." He looked around. "And there are only six of us."

"Hey!" Aaron, recognizing Jmsyn's mangled remains, turned to the Colonel. "I thought this guy surrendered!"

"He did," the big Garou shrugged. "Then he changed his mind."

"That's not important now." Eater's mouth tightened as she looked around. "Where is Jay No-Name?"

"We don't know." Goldberg stepped forward. "He and that 'brother' of his ran down to their father's lab," he said, gesturing toward the back of the building. "We haven't seen them since."

"One of my people is missin' as well." Colonel Sweet tossed his jacket over the body in the corner. "I left Brant here to keep an eye on things. Now, we can't find him."

"We have to go after Jay No-Name." Eater took a step toward the gym passageway.

"And leave the fomori behind us? Loose on the school grounds?"

"What can we do?" Goldberg crouched in front of the Colonel. "There are too many for us to take on."

"It doesn't matter how many there are." Sweet turned toward the other Garou, his face set. "We fight." His mouth split in that familiar grin. "That's what Garou do: we fight the Wyrms wherever we find it."

"That's an odd thing for you to say." Eater-of-Bears looked Sweet right in the eye. "Especially when you've been spending the past few years aiding a Progenitor mage in his experiments!"

"There's a reason for that."

"I'd like to hear it." Eater's voice was low, deadly.

"So would I." Aaron growled beside her.

"All right," the Colonel relented. "I'll tell you." He turned to Aaron. "What's the biggest problem in Garou society today?"

The Silver Fang shrugged. "Inbreeding. With the wild lands disappearing—and the lupus, like Eater here, going with them—we're losing our balance."

"Exactly," the Colonel agreed. "We're losin' the fight against civilization, stagnatin' in our little enclaves."

"What does that have to do with your Progenitor friend?"

Sweet smiled. "Dr. Caldwell was workin' on a way to solve the stagnation problem." He leaned forward. "He has managed to isolate the Garou gene, then implant it in a fertilized ovum."

"That means..."

"New blood. Garou that are strong, focused." Sweet locked eyes with Eater-of-Bears. "Garou like Jay."

"You mean..."

"Yes," the Colonel nodded. "Jay is the result of one of Caldwell's experiments."

"I cannot believe that." Eater-of-Bears turned away, shaken. "Jay No-Name is Garou, not some Wyrmspawned experiment!"

Sweet shrugged. "You've smelled him."

"And I have seen him in battle!" She turned, eyes burning. "I will need more than the word of a tainted Shadow Lord to believe *that* story!"

"Suit yourself, but..."

Terry picked that moment to speak up from his position at the door. "There's movement at the corner of the office building."

"Okay." Colonel Sweet nodded. "Let's get the lights off." His fangs gleamed. "It's time we went to work."



"Stop him!" Caldwell yelled the order to Kevin, leaning forward to grab the rail of his catwalk. "Don't let him get away with that staff!"

Kevin drove Jay into the wall, smiling as his brother's head *thunked* into the concrete blocks. *Take that, big brother!* He let the limp body fall to the floor and bounded toward the other cadet who'd been foolish enough to get involved. "Give me the staff, little boy!"

Brant stood his ground. "No." He held the wooden shaft in front of him in the closest thing he could manage to a defensive position. "I won't give it up."

"Give it to him!" The command was little more

than a gasp. Brant looked down and saw Jay pushing himself up from the floor. "He'll kill you if you don't!"

The cadet shook his head. "I can't let him have it."

Kevin growled, shuffled forward. "You'd better listen to him, boy!"

Jay struggled to his feet, brushed a hand across his mouth. "Give Kevin the staff." He managed a small smile. "It'll be okay."

Brant looked back and forth between the two brothers, nervously calculating his chances of running up the corridor. *He'd catch me before I went ten feet!*

Kevin took another step forward, held out his hand. "Last chance, boy!"

"Trust me." Jay caught Brant's eye, nodded calmly. "Give him the staff."

Brant closed his eyes. *What would the Colonel do?* Unable to come up with a better solution, he held the staff out to Kevin.

"That's better." The Garou grinned, reached out, grabbed the end of the staff...

And stared, frozen in place, as the flesh burned off his hands.

"Run!" Jay motioned urgently. "Tell the Colonel what's happening here!"

Brant needed no further urging. He turned away

from Kevin's stunned form and raced for the laboratory entrance.

"Now." Jay stepped forward, pulled the Staff of Dancing Star free of the younger boy's crisped hand. *He's not my brother!* Jay told himself, steeling his mind for battle. *Just another of Caldwell's experiments.* "Let's try this again."



Waller crouched in place, peering over the sights of his weapon as the lead squad reached the edge of the brick building. *Seems quiet enough.*

Like Dowling, he was ex-military. A man accustomed to giving, and obeying, orders. The two NCOs had joined Pentex at about the same time, each rejected by an army that seemed to be more interested in looking good than doing good.

Waller pumped his fist in the air, signaling his men to move forward on the double. As they passed him, he motioned them to stay near the side of the building. *Where is Dowling?* His point man reached the quadrangle and slid to a halt, covering the big square with his weapon. *He should have been out here to meet us.* Waller moved forward, leapfrogging the point man—and stopped when he saw the little pile of weapons and armor at the opposite edge of the big open yard.

Uh oh! Another quick signal to his men. I hope that's not what it looks like! He moved forward, more alert than ever. *Couldn't be Dowling.* Reaching the middle of the long building, he hunkered down, eyes alert for any movement. *Nothing.* He motioned his troops to follow, and they clattered into position. *No werewolf bastard could get Dowling! He's too smart for that!*

Waller nodded when the last of his troops slid into position, then moved the last hundred yards to what was clearly a pile of weapons, equipment—and bodies. He slowed as he saw the armored torso—*No!*—then sped forward, his jaw dropping open as he realized the extent of the carnage. *My God!* He looked down. *He's torn apart!* Another set of limbs caught his eyes. Then a third. *It's the whole squad!*

He touched his eyes for a moment, brushing away suddenly gathering moisture, then glared across the empty courtyard.

The lights in the Field House snapped off.

So, you're in there, are you?! Waller gave another series of hand signals, waited while the rest of his troops moved to his side. *I'll find you!* His hand caressed the hilt of his knife. *And then I'll skin you alive!*



"Looks like a single squad of fomori." Goldberg squinted, counting heads. "Eight of them." He turned to Colonel Sweet. "The leader has body armor of some kind."

"Like the one Jay and Heidel tackled." Aaron watched the movements outside. "I wonder if they're related?"

"It doesn't matter." The Colonel rubbed at the still-unhealed wound in his chest. "They'll be comin' in here any time now—and we have to be ready."

"What are we going to do?" Eater-of-Bears broke her silence, but refused to look at the Shadow Lord.

"We're goin' to use what we have." Sweet motioned at the long corridor they were standing in. "I was here when they built this Field House," he said, "and it's a bit more complex than it appears to be." He nodded toward Goldberg. "My people know its secrets. You'll have to stay close to them."

"And Jay?" Aaron glanced in the direction of the gym.

"Jay will have to wait until this is finished." Colonel Sweet motioned toward the now-moving group of fomori. "One way or another."



Jay backed away, his eyes wide with shock. *Why*

doesn't he stop? He had used the staff on Kevin again and again, slamming its butt into his side, his stomach, his face... It's working! I can feel the power flowing through it! I can see the burns! But...

Kevin kept coming.

"Why so surprised, Jay?" Dr. Caldwell was still leaning against the railing of his catwalk, enjoying the one-sided fight. "I *told* you he had abnormal endorphin levels." The mage sneered at the look on Jay's face. "No matter what you do, you *can't* hurt him!"

Can't be hurt. Jay looked at the maimed form of his brother. *That explains a lot.* He backed up another step. He had landed a square hit on Kevin's jaw just a second ago, had *felt* the jaw crack, seen his brother stagger, spitting bloody teeth out of a broken mouth.

But Kevin hadn't slowed down. Not even a little bit.

Jay shook his head, trying to think of something, *anything* he could do. *I've got to stop him!* He lunged forward, letting his grip on the staff slide all the way down; then, fighting for every bit of leverage he could get, he smashed it toward Kevin with all the force left in his tiring arms.

His brother caught it.

Jay froze in shock as power flowed through the fetish. The remaining flesh of Kevin's hand burned, the skin sloughing off until the bone became

starkly visible, blackened as his opponent somehow maintained a grip on the end of the staff.

"You can't win." The mage chuckled at the look on Jay's face. "You *will* go with us." He glanced at his watch. "And soon—our time is almost up." He leaned forward. "Kevin!" the boy's swollen face turned toward him. "Finish it!"

Kevin turned back to Jay, yanking the staff out of his brother's shocked grasp. In a heartbeat, he brought it around and down, the weighted end crashing into Jay's skull.

Jay's world went black.



Waller brought his squad to a halt just outside the Field House. *It's dark as hell in there*, he noted, hunkering down to check for any sign of occupancy. *Nothing visible at all*. He shook his head, pulled the button mike down from under the brow of his helmet, pressed the push-to-send switch on his belt. "Hey, Polkow!" The other fomori squad leader had taken his troops into the forested area around the school to check for any signs of Garou out there. "Have you found anything?"

Nearly two miles away, a tall, stick-thin man with pure white hair signaled his squad to halt and drew out his own mike. "There's nobody out this way. We haven't even found any tracks."

"They're here, hiding in the school." Waller glanced back toward the stacked bodies at the edge of the quadrangle. "We found Dowling."

"And?"

"He's dead."

Polkow nodded. That would explain the silence. "The others?"

"Not sure." He grimaced. "But there are a lot of bits and pieces around."

"Damn Garou!" Polkow signaled his troops to come in from flank and point. "I'm bringing my guys back in—you're gonna want backup."

Waller nodded. "Yep, I think that's a good bet." He took another look at the darkened front of the Field House. "How long before you get here?"

"Twenty minutes," the white-haired fomor replied, counting heads as troops trotted in. "Maybe half an hour."

"Good enough." Waller held up a hand to his own squad, signaling them to be ready to move. "I'm heading into the Field House—the lights there went out while I was watching." He looked down at the little walkie-talkie clipped to his belt. "I may not be able to talk to you from inside—I don't know how thick the walls are."

"Okay. We'll head straight for the Field House. I'll meet you there."

"Make it quick." Waller pushed the button-mike back up, under the lip of his helmet. *Time to move.*

He motioned to his troops, waited until the flank men had reached their positions, then ran toward the front door of the Field House, slamming into it just as he reached full speed.

Glass shattered as Waller staggered through, half-falling. He came up against the corridor wall with a *SLAM* of armor against concrete. "I'm in!" he bellowed.

Immediately, both side doors slammed open and flankers stormed into the corridor.

There wasn't a single living creature there to stop them.

"Nothing here, boss!" Waller's assistant, Rogers, had followed him in, ready to cover the squad leader's rear from any hidden attacker.

"If there's no one here, why did the lights go out?" Waller waited while the rest of his force spread out, covering the hallway and entrance corridors to the gymnasium beyond.

"Automatics?" Rogers looked around, his heightened senses allowing him to see perfectly well in the dimness of the Field House's entry corridor. "Timed to go off when the sun came up."

Waller nodded. "Maybe." He pointed to a dark spot further down the hall. "There's a switch over there—let's take a look."

Weapons ready, the two former NCOs marched to the angle between the entry hall and the gym corridor. There was a multiple switch pad there

that was clearly designed to control the overhead lights in both areas.

"Look!" Rogers bent toward the remains of the switch plate. "That's a claw mark!" He poked his finger into the deeply grooved plastic. "Must be a quarter inch deep!"

"Garou." Waller's eyes swept the hallway, searching for movement. "They're in here, all right." He motioned to Rogers as he clicked the safety off his rifle. "Deploy the men!"

"How do you want them?"

Waller took a long step back, giving himself a little room to maneuver. He stayed ready, his eyes never still as he scanned the corridors. "Let's see..." He turned to check the whole length of the corridor, noting the three halls that branched off, leading to the gym and locker rooms. "Break the men into pairs, then..."

"Colonel Sweet!" The voice was excited.

"Center corridor!" Waller snapped out the order, hand up and circling to signal the rest of his squad. "Everybody ready!"

Troops scrambled to set up an overlapping field of fire, each weapon trained on the dark hole that led into the gym.

"Colonel!" Closer now.

"Wait for it!" Waller raised his own rifle, the sights centered on the midpoint of the gym

corridor. The fomor began to put pressure on the trigger.

"Sir?" A Garou in Crinos form burst into view, his right arm hanging uselessly to one side. "It's Brant, sir!"

"Fire." Waller's voice remained quiet and matter-of-fact as he squeezed the trigger.



"Bring him up here, Kevin." Dr. Caldwell pulled the big blast door at the end of the catwalk open. "I have a container ready that should hold him without any trouble."

"You're not going to hurt him, are you?"

"No!" The mage's smile was immediate and seemingly genuine. "He's an extraordinary specimen!" He stood in the doorway. Before him stretched a dimly lit corridor. "I'd *never* harm him!"

Kevin nodded and ducked through the blast door, careful not to hit Jay's head on the door sill. "What about that staff of his?" He rubbed at his cheek, felt burnt skin flake away under his fingers.

"Leave it." Caldwell closed the blast door, dogged it shut. "It's too dangerous for us to deal with in the limited time we have left."

"How much time is there?"

The mage glanced at his watch. "Under four

minutes." He smiled and moved up the corridor. "Not that it matters now. With the blast door shut, we're perfectly safe."

They reached a large, open area. "Just put him on that table over there," Caldwell ordered, gesturing to the side. "I've got to prepare the proper medication."

Kevin moved to the side of the room, lowered Jay's limp body onto the gurney. "How do we get out of here if the door is locked?"

The scientist gestured toward the roof. "See those cracks up there?"

Kevin nodded.

"This school used to be a Nike-Hercules anti-aircraft base." Caldwell picked up an IV bottle, injected a second solution into it. "I built the lab in what used to be the missile assembly area. This was the launching area." He located an IV needle and attached a tube to the needle. "We're standing on the missile elevator." The other end of the tube snapped into a prepared nipple on the snout of the IV bottle. "The exact center of the running track is right over our heads. When we're ready, we open the doors, bring the elevator up," he reached out for an IV holding rack, pulled one to his side, "and load our equipment onto the helicopter."

"Won't the Pentex people try to stop us?"

Caldwell attached the bottle to a stand and picked up Jay's arm, searching for a vein under the

thick coating of brownish fur. "They'll try. But they'll never be able to stop *you!*" The needle slid through skin and muscle. The mage nodded when a drop of blood appeared in the tubing. "Not now." He smiled and reached toward the key of the IV, ready to inject the medication into Jay's veins. "Not ever!"



As the fomori started firing, a bullet struck Brant in the shoulder and spun him around. He knocked into the wall and fell flat. *Where did these guys come from?* He tried to crawl for cover, but he knew he had not chance to escape. Just as he started to move, guns swiveled in his direction and bullets blasted into the floor in front of him.

Tiles disintegrated, throwing ceramic powder into his face. Brant closed his eyes—*I can't even fight back!*—and prepared for the end.

There was a loud CRASH and several huge forms dropped through the suddenly fragmented ceiling, right into the midst of the fomori.



Waller waited for the Garou to get good and close before he fired. He deliberately aimed just a bit to the right of the torso—*let the bastard suffer!*—

and was gratified when he saw the creature spun by the impact of the hit. *That one's for Dowling!*

He held his fire while the Garou bounced off the corridor wall—*no use wasting ammo*—then opened up again, tracking the beast's fall to the floor. He smiled at the expression on the monster's face. *He's scared!* Waller dropped his sights a hair, put a round into the floor, just in front of the creature. Dust flew into his face. *Now*, he told himself. *He knows what's coming!* Waller raised his aim, setting his sights on the Garou's forehead. *Die!* He calmly began to squeeze the trigger...

And was shocked when the ceiling opened above him. *What the hell?!* Before he could shift position and bring his weapon around, a huge form dropped down next to him. Three-inch claws whipped at him, smashed his rifle from his hand. He reached for his knife, grasped the hilt he had so carefully wrapped with electric tape, just as those razor-sharp claws came around again. *No!*

He never knew if he screamed aloud or not....



Aaron saw Colonel Sweet leap off the catwalk that wound above the acoustic tiles of the Field House's ceiling. He waited a second, then jumped after the big Garou. The flimsy acoustic tile ripped

under his weight, and he found himself dropping into the middle of three fomori troops. *Got to be quick!*

As he hit the ground, he let his knees flex, taking up the force of the impact. At the same time, he swept his claws through the thigh of the man nearest him, tearing out the Achilles tendon, sending the fomor crashing to the floor, writhing in pain. *That's one!*

He came upright, continuing the turn his sweep had started, grabbing the barrel of the nearest fomor's weapon and pulling it out of his hand. *Two!*

Still turning, he swept the rifle through the rest of the arc, smashing it into the side of the third fomor's head. The plastic stock shattered on impact, but the metal recoil adjuster inside crushed the man's helmet, stopping only when it impacted against the side of his head.

The fomor dropped like a rock. *Three!*

Still, it paid to be sure. Aaron spun back to his left, eyes searching for the fomor from whom he had snatched the weapon. The man was still upright, pulling a knife from a sheath at his side. The Silver Fang grinned. *This is gonna be fun!* He waited while the fomor drew the weapon, actually fell back a half-step to encourage him. *Come on!* Aaron held up his hands. *Come and get me!* The man finally got his knife out, crouching as he faced

the Garou. Then he touched a button on the side of the hilt, and the blade *whooshed* free, heading right for Aaron's heart.

That's not fair! The white-furred Garou dodged with lightning reflexes, barely escaping the silver-bladed weapon's path. Then he turned toward the hapless human, fangs slavering. *Not fair at all!*



Rogers was shocked when the huge white Garou dropped in front of him. Caught off-guard, he stood helplessly as it whirled, grabbed Munholland's rifle, and smashed it into the side of his helmet. The impact turned his world gray, and he'd dropped to the floor, certain that he'd never get up again.

But the monster didn't finish its attack. Instead, it turned back to Munholland, actually waiting while the trooper got his knife out. Rogers was slowly regaining his senses as his friend fired the ballistic knife.

That'll get him! he thought, exulting. But the creature ducked with inhuman speed and the blade impacted harmlessly against the wall. Rogers saw the look on the Garou's face, saw the long red tongue come out.

Run, John! He tried to yell the words, but nothing would come out. *Run!*

It wouldn't have mattered. The huge creature had already closed the distance between it and Munholland, inch-long teeth flashing in what little sunlight had, by now, leaked into the corridor.

As Rogers watched helplessly, those fangs came together with a loud *CRUNCH* and Munholland was tossed from side to side like a snake caught in a mongoose's jaws.

There was a *CRACK* as the hapless trooper's neck snapped.

He'll be after me next! Rogers realized with a start. *I've got to do something!* He looked around, scrabbling for something he could use to defend himself.

He touched something long and hard. *My rifle!* With trembling hands, Rogers pulled the weapon to him, careful to keep it from grinding against the floor tiles. *Can't let him hear me!* He finally got both hands on the gun, checking by touch that the clip was in place, the safety off. *It's all right!* He raised the weapon, aimed at the back of the white creature that was so close it filled his sights. *Gotta be careful!* He centered the lights on the base of the spine, wavered, then steadied. *Can't miss!*

Rogers squeezed the trigger.

D

Jay.

Jay stirred. There was something he had to do—someone he had to fight.

Wake up, Jay.

There was a touch on his arm. Jay tried to turn his head, tried to open his eyes.

Failed.

You have to wake up, Jay.

The voice was so familiar. He'd heard it before. Where?

If you don't move now, you'll never save your mother! There was a movement in the darkness that surrounded him. *Never!*

"Dancing Star? Are you there?"

Yes, Jay. And suddenly she was there, her eyes full of concern. *I'm always here.* She motioned to him. *You've got to wake up, Jay. You've got to stop Caldwell!*

"Can't." Jay tried to shake his head. *"Can't move."*

Reach inside yourself, Jay. She was suddenly inches from his face. Her eyes burned into his. *Find the place where Uktena dwells.* Her eyes started to whirl, fiery, compelling. *Uktena will give you the strength you need....*

She drifted away. First to arm's length, then farther, farther....

"Don't leave me, Dancing Star!" Jay cried out to

her, the pain of being alone again—as he had been all of his life—rushing through him. “Help me!”

You must help yourself. She was almost out of sight now. *It’s the only way.*

Jay felt a pain in his arm—a needle, driving deep into his flesh. Again he tried to move. Again he failed.

How do I find Uktena? He searched inside himself, desperation filling him as he saw nothing but blackness. *Where is he?*

There was a spot of brightness. A *light*. Jay moved toward IT. *Uktena!*

And his eyes opened.

“He’s awake!” Dr. Caldwell backed away, the IV key still closed. “Kevin, come here, quickly!”

Jay shook himself, tried to take in his surroundings. *Some kind of storage area...*

Then he saw the containers. *Mother!* He rose to feet, kicked the gurney away.

And found the mangled form of Kevin in his path. “Sit down, Jay.” The blackened face creased in a one-sided smile. “Or I’ll knock you down.”

Jay growled. “Not this time!” He sprang at his brother.



Colonel Sweet finished off his prey in the blink

of an eye. *Stupid!* he thought, regarding the armored figure under his feet. *Growing armor on humans.* He shook his head. *All it does is slow them down.*

He turned away from his kill and evaluated the results of his ambush. *The kids are doing all right,* he noted as he watched Goldberg down his opponent, rolling under the fomor's field of fire and driving his claws up through the abdomen, into the defenseless heart. *Messy, but effective.*

On the other side, Terry had landed directly on top of his target. His weight drove the fomor to the floor, helmet smashing with the force of the impact. Splinters drove into the creature's brain, killing him instantly.

Quick and clean! The Colonel smiled. *I'll have to congratulate him!*

There was a silvery movement to his right. Sweet turned in time to see Aaron dance away from the ballistic knife. *Nasty weapon.* The Colonel shook his head. *And not very honorable.* He nodded as the Silver Fang leaped onto his opponent, closing iron jaws around the fomor's neck, snapping his spine. *Better than he deserves.* Then he noted a furtive movement behind the white-furred Garou. *What's that?* He took a step closer, saw the supine fomor pull a weapon up, aimed at Aaron's unsuspecting back.

Sweet's hand flashed to the floor and snatched up

the knife Waller had been trying so desperately to reach. *I'd better make this good—he threw the weapon with all the strength in his giant body—or I'll have to fight both Jay and Eater-of-Bears!*



Aaron released the body of the fomor, spitting the sour taste of its blood out of his mouth. *Whew, these guys sure taste bad!* He turned toward the main fight, trying to see how Eater-of-Bears was doing. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Colonel Sweet reach down, pick something up. *What's he up to?* Then the knife was coming toward him, moving fast, turning end-over-end. *What the hell!* Aaron ducked—the blade whizzed past him.

He glared at the big Garou—and then dropped to the ground as a gun roared to life behind him.



Got him! Colonel Sweet grinned as the knife hit the fomor square in the chest, and then winced as the machine gun the man was holding went off. *Did that hit Aaron?* He saw the white-furred Garou fall to the floor. *No! There's no blood.* Sweet surged forward, running to reach the side of the Silver Fang. *I'll bet he's scared!* He smiled. *He'll never admit it, though.*

Jay was scared. *Whatever I try, it doesn't do any good at all!* He had charged his brother with all the force he could muster, smashing into the other boy's mangled body, crushing blackened bones, tearing skin that was burnt to the consistency of paper. *And it didn't faze him!* Kevin had just rocked back, letting Jay spend his strength. Slowly, implacably, he forced him back, pushing him, step by step, toward the huge container in the corner that Caldwell had prepared for his brother's body.

I can't lose like this! Jay tried to wriggle free, reached deep inside himself, searching for his last reserves of strength. *I won't lose like this!*

"Don't fight him, Jay." Dr. Caldwell's voice was confident. "It's like fighting yourself."

No! Jay's rage bubbled up inside him. *That's not me—and it's not my brother!* He saw Dancing Star's concerned eyes, saw his mother, floating helplessly, trapped in the mage's thrall. *It's just more of your evil!* The face of the father he'd never known swam up, gazed into his eyes, begged for vengeance. *I'll never give up!*

Jay growled at Kevin, the sound growing lower, more powerful.

Then Jay was gone, swallowed by his rage. In his place stood a twelve-foot-long, tawny cat, saber-teeth already thrusting toward Kevin's throat.

It took Polkow longer to assemble his troops than he'd thought it would. "Where the hell is Jefferson!"

"You know how he is," Todt, his second-in-command, said, shrugging. "He kept pushin' forward. I don't know where he's gotten to by now."

"Damn!" Polkow pulled the button mike down, switched to the squad-frequency. "Hey! Jefferson!"

No answer. Just the faint sputter of static.

"Jefferson, this is Polkow." The NCO pulled the walkie-talkie off his belt, checked that the frequency was right. "You'd better answer me!"

Silence.

Polkow glared at Todt. "I told Waller we'd be there in twenty minutes!" He held up his watch. "It's been almost half an hour!"

"Why don't you try to call Waller, tell him what's goin' on?"

The NCO shook his head. "Tried that. Nothing at his end, either."

"What are you going to do?"

"We're gonna have to split up." He called the rest of the squad to him. "You keep Shenk and Hollings with you. Scout around, find Jefferson." He glared at Todt. "And keep in touch!"

"I will."

"The rest of you come with me." Polkow clipped

the radio back to his belt. "We're gonna head into the school compound, find out what Waller's up to." He stroked his chin. "I want you all to be careful. Whoever's in there already took out Dowling and his team—and you know how tough they were!"

"Not as tough as we are, Sarge!"

"Easy for you to say, Shenk," Bermen chuckled. "You're gonna stay out here in the woods—where it's nice and safe!"

"Nothing's safe!" Polkow's voice thundered. "Remember that!"

Silence fell over the group.

"Okay." Polkow checked the safety on his rifle. "Todt, they're all yours." He glared at his second-in-command. "And God help you if anything happens to them!"



Back in the Field House, Brant finally realized that he wasn't dead. "Colonel Sweet?!"

"Mr. Brant." The big Garou strolled over to the cadet, Aaron next to him. "You realize that you nearly compromised my ambush?"

"Sorry, sir." He rubbed at the blood still trickling from his shoulder. "No excuse, sir."

Sweet nodded. "We'll discuss it later; for now, you have somethin' to report?"

"Sir." Brant straightened up, spat out the words with something close to military precision. "As instructed, I stayed here in the Field House during the engagement with the first group of fomori." He leaned forward. "You handled them very well!"

"Stay on the subject, cadet!"

"Yes sir." He dropped his head, looked at the floor. "Sorry, sir." He took a deep breath. "Anyway, I was here in the Field House when I heard movement at the side door." He pointed to the left of the entry hall. "It was Jay and his brother, Kevin."

Aaron nodded. "Yeah, Jay said they were coming here."

"They were talking about something called a *sterilization timer*, and how little time they had."

The Colonel looked at Aaron, who shrugged. "I don't know anything about that."

"They didn't see me." Brant looked a little sheepish. "I was trying to stay out of sight, keep an eye on things."

Sweet nodded. "Good tactics. You did follow them, though...."

Brant nodded. "They went through the gym into the seniors' locker room—there was a door with a special lock way in the back."

"I know where it is."

"Kevin opened it up and they went through."

Brant shivered. He looked at the Colonel, pain in his eyes. "Sir, it was a *terrible* place!"

Sweet nodded. "Caldwell's secret lab."

"They'd just gotten inside when Dr. Caldwell showed up..." Brant's brow furrowed. "...and everything changed."

"What do you mean?"

"Kevin's face just went blank, as if he were some kind of machine—and he started fighting with Jay!" Brant's eyes were wide now as he remembered. "Sir, Kevin was too strong. Stronger than anyone I'd ever seen. Jay had no chance against him."

"What did he do to Jay!" Aaron's eyes were hard now, remorseless.

"He dragged him into another room, where Dr. Caldwell was preparing some kind of drugs." Brant straightened himself. "Jay had dropped that staff he always carries. I picked it up...."

"It didn't hurt you?" Colonel Sweet leaned forward, checking for burns.

"No sir," Brant shook his head. "I followed Kevin, figured I might be able to attack from behind, give Jay a chance to escape."

"And?"

"Jay saw me and told me to give the staff to Kevin!"

"What happened to Kevin when he took the staff?"

Brant shuddered. "His hands started to burn!"

Really bad! That's when Jay told me to run, tell you what was happening." He looked at Colonel Sweet, his eyes imploring. "Did I do the right thing?"

"You did fine, Brant." Sweet patted the youngster on the uninjured shoulder. "Now, take care of that arm so you can fight again."

"Uh," Brant looked at the Colonel, mouth set. "There's something else."

"What's that?"

"The sterilization timer, sir. They never stopped it. It's going to set off some sort of bomb in..." Brant stole a glance at the clock mounted on the wall. "...about ten minutes."

Aaron looked to the Colonel. "What do we do?"

"Fomori!" Terry was pointing out into the quadrangle. "Coming in from the athletic field."

Sweet's smile was hard. "Nice timin'!"



Dr. Caldwell laughed with delight when Jay shifted into his cat form. "Wonderful!" He moved as close to the battle as possible, studying the tawny figure. "A Smilodon! That's incredible!"

The mage turned and pulled open a chest of equipment leaning against one of the containers. "Hold him, Kevin, while I get a camera!" There was a loud crunch, then the sound of something hitting the floor.

"Don't hurt him, Kevin!" The scientist turned, touching controls on a multi-function video camera. "I want to study him!"

There was a roar of fury. "Oh my!" Caldwell found himself staring into the green eyes of the great cat, crouched on top of the still-twitching remains of Kevin.

"Oh my," the mage said again, taking a slow step backward.

The beast that had been Jay roared again, louder this time, then moved toward the mage, stubby tail twitching, blood dripping off razor-sharp teeth.



"What do we do?" Aaron stood at Colonel Sweet's side, waiting for directions.

"There're only four of them." Sweet shrugged and motioned his people together. "Shouldn't be too difficult to isolate them if they try to come after us." The big Garou smiled. "And we already know just how effective their 'improvements' have been."

"What about Jay No-Name?" Eater-of-Bears had been quiet for long enough. She still didn't trust the Shadow Lord with the metal arm—and she was anxious to find out the truth about the Garou she was already thinking of as her packmate.

"I haven't forgotten about that." The big Garou

turned to her, eyes hard. "We have to take care of these fomori first. Then we can go after Jay."

Eater hesitated, then nodded. "Just as long as it's soon. He may need our help."

Sweet nodded. "Believe me, I have no intention of lettin' Jay fight our good Dr. Caldwell alone."

"Okay." The lupus moved forward. "We'd better hurry. What's the plan?"



Dr. Caldwell backed slowly away from the monstrous beast. *Just have to take it easy*, he told himself. *It's just an animal. Jay's intelligence is buried under the rage.* He felt his foot touch a bit of metal. *Good.* He sidled a bit to one side. *The controls should be just about...*

The back of his knee hit the open equipment chest.

Damn! Caldwell fought for balance, struggling to keep from falling. *If I fall, he'll spring!* The mage tottered for a split second, then regained his footing.

That was exciting. He moved a bit to the right, angling away from the chest. *The control should be right...* His hand brushed against the edge of a metal box. *Here!* He smiled. *Another demonstration of mind over brute force!* He ran his fingers over the

controls on top of the box. *Third from the right, I think...* His finger found the appropriate button. The Smilodon was closer now, its fetid breath ruffling the cloth of Caldwell's shirt. The mage looked it right in the eye and grinned. *See how you like this!*

He pressed the button—and the sirens resumed their wailing.



"Not again!" Aaron shifted to human form, quickly bringing his hands up to shield his ears.

"This might be to our advantage," Sweet yelled, grimacing as the wailing struck to his soul. "The fomori will think we're helpless."

"They'll be right!"

"Half-right." The Colonel motioned his remaining troops to his side. "No Garou is ever completely helpless." He tried to smile. "Besides, only *we* know that the sterilization countdown is runnin'."

"That's right!" Aaron's face lit up. "We could lead them down there!"

The Colonel nodded. "And make sure there's somethin' appropriate to sterilize." He turned to Terry. "Pick up a couple of those guns—we may have to encourage them to follow us."

Eater-of-Bears bumped his knees, racked with pain even in lupus form.

"I haven't forgotten about Jay, Eater." Sweet inclined his head toward the corridor. "You and Aaron head down to the lab first. See if you can find him."

The big wolf nodded, trotted away.

"And be careful!" Sweet grabbed Aaron by the shoulder as he passed. "Don't underestimate Dr. Caldwell."

"We won't." Aaron took the Colonel's hand. "See you in the lab."

"In less than ten minutes."

The youth nodded, then turned and followed the lupus.

"Can we do this, Colonel?" Terry handed the big officer a MAC-10, his face showing the unease he felt at handling the weapon. "With these?" "We'll handle them." The Colonel's face was set as he refamiliarized himself with the little weapon. "What choice do we have?"



"What the hell is that!" Polkow was just outside the Field House when the sirens began their ear-piercing wail.

"Some kind of alarm system!" Bermen was next to him, grimacing as the decibel level rose.

"For what?" The white-haired fomor peered around the compound. "Fire? Theft?" He squinted toward the dormitories. "Are we gonna be inundated with a bunch of snot-nosed cadets?"

"I don't know about that." Bermen leaned closer, his face set against the cacophony. "But I'll tell you one thing: if there are Garou around, they ain't gonna like this."

Polkow brightened. "You're right!" He raised his right hand. "We're never going to get a better chance than this!" He pumped his fist, encouraging Grant and Sams to run to his side. "Come on!" He pointed to the Field House. "It's time to nail us some werewolves!"

Together, the four fomori charged into the gloom of the Field House entrance.



The wailing of the siren repelled the big cat, driving it away from the speakers mounted on the walls of the launch chamber. It backed into the middle of the room, snarling at the enemy that struck it from all sides, trying to stop the pain that kept stabbing at its ears.

Caldwell watched, entranced. *Look at the strength!* The mage shook his head. *There are four speakers in here—a Garou would have collapsed long ago!* He smiled. *If I can just duplicate his DNA*

patterns, I can make an army of such creatures! The smile widened. An unbeatable army!

The cat's eyes were dulling now, its strength draining as the killing noise continued. The animal pawed at its ears, trying to block the sound. It glared around the room searching for an enemy—any enemy—to attack.

Any second now... Caldwell peered at the cat. I'd better get ready.

In the center of the room, the big saber-tooth finally collapsed, teeth bared at the only enemy it had failed to defeat.



Polkow crashed through the already broken door of the Field House and immediately tripped on the mangled body of Waller lying just inside.

That was the only thing that saved him.

Damn! he thought as bullets passed through the air he had occupied a split second before. *They've got guns!* He saw Grant, on his right, go down, hit once, twice. *And they know how to use them!* Polkow searched for cover. *Nothing!* The hallway was flat and narrow—nothing to hide behind. He crawled a bit to his right, gritting his teeth as bullets dug into the tiles around him. *Those were too close!* Reaching back, he grabbed Waller by the chest, cringing as his hand sunk into a deep wound. *Sorry,*

pal! He pulled the body forward, setting it in front of him. More bullets hit, thudding into Waller's unfeeling flesh just as Polkow pulled his hand free. *But I need the cover!*

Fractionally more secure, he scanned the dim hallway, trying to see where the shots were coming from. He noted that Bremen and Sams had both made it into the building safely, and were, like him, using bodies as cover. *Those Garou will pay for this!* Another burst of fire forced his head down. *Assuming I can find a way to reach them!*

He couldn't tell where the shots were coming from—the sirens were too loud, deafening in such a confined space. *If they're bothering me, they must be killing the damn wolves!* Polkow grinned as he thought about that, then realized what it meant. *They can't hear me!* He looked around, grabbed Waller's walkie-talkie from the belt holster right in front of him. *That means...* He flipped the radio to one side, watched it hit the ground.

No shots came out of the darkness.

They've got to see us to shoot at us! Polkow's grin widened as he reached under his flak vest and pulled out an oblong shape. *Maybe I can fix it so they can't see anything!* He pulled the pin from the little grenade, sidearmed it into the middle of the hallway.

Smoke poured out.

Now we're equal, wolf-boys! He rolled to one side, came to his feet, rifle ready. *Let's see who wins now!*



Todt finally found Jefferson near the edge of the woods. The fomori point-man had a greatly enhanced sense of smell, and when he ran across the spoor of several Garou not far from the squad's search area, he couldn't resist following to see where it led.

"Todt, I'm tellin' you that they came along that trail." Jefferson pointed to a little running path that went from the edge of the woods to the road beyond. "Several of them—the most recent just a day or two ago."

"That's nice, Jefferson." Todt gave the smaller man a pat on the back, checking the setting on his walkie-talkie as he did so. "But we *know* where the Garou are right *now*."

"You do?"

Todt nodded. "They're back in the school compound, in the Field House." He pulled the radio off the point man's belt. "You'd know that if you kept your radio turned on."

"Ah, Todt." The little fomor shrugged his shoulders. "You know how much noise that thing makes. It makes it tough for me to concentrate...."

"I know, Jefferson." Todt shoved the radio back, motioned for the little man to follow him. "But Polkow isn't going to be so understanding."

"Where is he?" Jefferson's neck lengthened unnaturally as he looked beyond Todt. "I'd like to talk to him about following this trail—see where it leads."

"Not now, Jefferson." Todt turned, pushed the little fomor along. "Right now we have to join up with the rest of the squad—back them up while they root out the Garou."

"But the trail..."

"It's an old trail, Jefferson." Todt took a deep breath—*patience!* he told himself. "You said yourself it was a couple of days old."

"But..."

"No buts." Todt stopped, looked Jefferson full in the eye. "Waller went in without backup because of you. I'm not going to let Polkow make the same mistake."

"Waller's gone?"

"Probably." Todt gave Jefferson a push and fell in behind him. "And if Polkow buys it because of you..." The tall fomor lifted his rifle, resting it in the crook of his elbow. "...well, I guarantee you'll never follow another trail again."

A few steps away, Shenk appeared out of the woods. "There's something going on here that you

should know about." He motioned Todt to follow him.

"This better not be another wild goose chase!" He shoved Jefferson forward and followed him to the trooper's side. "What do you have?"

"Listen." Shenk cupped a hand to his ear.

Todt stopped moving, turned in the direction Shenk indicated. "I don't hear..." The muffled wail of a siren could be heard above the muted rustle of the trees. "...wait a minute."

"It started a couple of minutes ago." Shenk motioned the other two to follow him. "Most of it is coming from the school...."

"Fire alarm?"

The fomor shook his head. "We don't think so." He started down the trail. "I'll show you why."

The three troops moved down the narrow path. Todt kept an eye on Jefferson to make sure that he didn't hare after some other distracting scent. "It's just ahead," Shenk told them. "Hollings is waiting there for us."

They broke through the last bit of forest. Hollings waved at them from his position just behind the two helicopters.

"Here?" Todt looked around in surprise.

"Not exactly." Shenk pushed him forward. "Go ahead, you'll see."

Polkow trotted toward the helicopters. "Make

sure Jefferson stays with you!" He yelled over his shoulder. Shenk nodded. As Polkow approached the choppers, he noticed that the sirens were getting louder. *That's odd*, he thought. *It's almost as if...*

He stopped next to Hollings. "The noise is coming from under us, isn't it?"

The other fomer nodded. "Yeah. I think it is."

Todt shook his head. "Polkow should know about this." He pulled his mike down, pushed the send button of his radio. "Polkow, this is Todt. Do you read me?"

There was a squawk of static—then nothing.

"Damn!" Todt jammed the mike back up under his helmet. "Blasted things never work right!"

"What do you want to do about this?" Hollings asked.

Todt looked around. "I don't know." His eyes stopped when they reached the helicopters. "We can't leave the choppers unguarded if there's any chance..."

The muffled sound of the sirens cut off.



Jay's eyes snapped open. *What happened to me?* He touched his forehead, trying to rub away the pain that stabbed into his brain. *I remember fighting with Kevin, remember him pushing me back...*

He looked around. *Kevin! Where...* A blackened mound caught his eye. *Kevin?*

Jay staggered toward the pile, collapsing next to it as he saw the gentle slope of shoulders. *Oh Kevin...*

"You're the one who killed him."

Jay sprang to his feet, eyes searching for the source of that voice.

"It's true." Dr. Caldwell appeared from behind a metallic cylinder. "First you blistered him with that stick of yours, then, when that didn't work, you tore his throat out."

"But..." Jay struggled to remember. "He was stronger than I am!"

"That's true," the mage nodded. "But only while you were both in Garou form."

"The cat..."

Caldwell nodded again. "Your Bastet form—Smilodon, as a matter of fact." He gave Jay an admiring look. "Quite extraordinary."

"Monster!" Jay came to his feet, shifted into Garou form. "You're responsible for all of this!"

"Do you really think so?" The mage smiled at Jay. "I like to *think* that my experiments made your transformation possible, but it is nice to get independent verification."

Jay took a step toward Caldwell. "Give me a reason why I shouldn't kill you now!"

"I'll give you two." He smiled, held up a control box. "Reason number one." He pressed a button.

Instantly, the room was filled with the wailing ululation of the emergency sirens. Jay fell to his knees at the onslaught of sound, unable to hold his Crinos form, unable even to stand. "Turn it off!"

"Certainly." Another touch of the button—the noise stopped.

Jay tossed his head, came swaying to his feet. "I don't need claws to kill you." He took a step toward the scientist.

"Ah," Caldwell smiled, the little control still in his hands. "But you forget reason number two!"

"Which is?" Jay took another step.

The mage half turned, indicated the cylinder that stood next to him. "Know what's in this?" Caldwell inclined his head, looked at Jay. "I really think you'll want to know." He touched a button on his control box. Instantly, the side of the cylinder darkened, then went completely transparent.

Jay halted in his tracks, stunned.

"Yes, Jay." Caldwell patted the side of the container. "It's your mother."

My mother! Jay stared, unable to take his eyes off the soft form that floated in a bubbling pool of clear liquid.

"She's quite all right." The mage indicated a

panel of lights and digital readouts at the bottom of the cylinder. "Held in a kind of stasis."

"Let her out."

Caldwell shook his head. "I don't think so." He smiled. "At least not until I know I can trust you a bit more."

"What do you want from me!"

"Nothing you can't deliver." He pointed to the ceiling above. "Almost over our heads are two Pentex helicopters. Either of them is big enough to carry what I want out of this..." Caldwell gestured around him, "...somewhat unsafe place." He looked at Jay. "All you have to do is kill the fomori who are up there guarding those helicopters."

"And if I don't?"

"Then I turn off the circulating system that keeps your mother alive." The mage shrugged. "It's up to you."

Jay snarled.



"The sirens are off!"

Polkow snarled at Bermen, moving a step to his side. "I know they're off! Keep your mouth shut!" There was a loud *thud*, followed by a choked-off scream. "Bermen?" Polkow stopped in the middle of the smoke. *They got him!* He raised his rifle—

can't see a thing! He began to fire blindly into the smoke on the side Bermen had been covering. *Maybe I'll get lucky.*

He didn't. Within a second, there was another scream on his left. *Sams!* Again Polkow turned, firing blindly into the smoke that clogged the corridor. *Damn Garou bastards!* His weapon clicked on empty. Polkow took a step to the side, popped the clip release, pulled a full clip out of his belt pouch...

The smoke wasn't so thick here. He could see shapes around him.

Moving shapes.

Damn! Polkow slipped the clip into the end of the receiver, pushed it up. There was a *click!* as it locked into place.

Something loomed out of the smoke in front of him, grabbing the barrel of his rifle, pulling it up. Polkow yelled, pulled the trigger. Bullets screamed into the ceiling as the shape twisted the rifle. Polkow felt the bones of his trigger finger snap, felt his wrist break. He scrabbled under his vest for another grenade. *I'm not going alone!* Just as his fingers touched the metallic shape, a huge claw came out of the smoke, ripped through the muscles of his shoulder, cutting them away. Polkow lost control of his hand. *Gotta get away!* The fomor tried to stumble back, tried to duck, tried...

...Failed.

"That's the last one."

"Good." Colonel Sweet stood next to Terry, looking down at the dying form. "How much time until Caldwell's bomb goes off?"

Brant looked up at the clock. "Four minutes."

"We'd better be goin'." He turned toward the gymnasium.

"Wouldn't it be safer for us to leave now?" Goldberg motioned toward the door and the clear quadrangle beyond. "Get out into the woods?"

"Yes," the Colonel nodded. "It would be safer." He stared at the cadet. "But I'd have to break my promise to Aaron and Eater-of-Bears, and that wouldn't be very honorable." He grinned. "Besides, Caldwell is down there." The big Garou strode toward the gymnasium passageway. "He owes me somethin'." Sweet's face became an implacable mask. "And I plan to collect!"



"What's going on?" Shenk stumbled as the ground under him began to move.

"It's some kind of door!" Todt took a step back, unslung his rifle. "Everybody get ready!"

The squad pulled back a few steps, training their weapons on the square opening that had suddenly appeared in the middle of the little clearing.

"Are the choppers okay?" Todt moved a bit to his

right, trying to see both of the Hueys, make sure the landing skids were in no danger of crumpling into the opening door.

"They're clear." Hollings moved forward, crouched down to look through the slowly expanding crack. "I wonder what's down there?"

"Don't get too close." Todt took another step back. "It may be..."

Hollings screamed as a long arm appeared, grabbing him by the front of his flak vest, pulling him toward the widening opening. "Todt!" The fomor dropped his gun, tried to claw at the sod under his hands. "Help me, Todt!" His head went through the opening. "Help!"

"Hollings!" Todt rushed forward, dove to the ground and grabbed at Hollings' legs. "I've got you, man!" He turned his head, yelled: "Shenk! Get your butt over here!" The other trooper rushed to his side. "Grab the other leg!" He gritted his teeth. "Pull!"

Hollings continued to yell as more of him disappeared into the dark. His head and neck were gone, then his shoulders....

"Pull harder!" Todt dug his feet in, raising a divot in the sod as he yanked at the leg of his teammate. "Don't give up!"

Hollings' body was gone to the waist now, and the two fomori were inching closer to the widening opening.

"Pull!" Todt felt the body move slightly toward him. "We've got him! With me now, one—two—three: Pull!"

This time, their efforts were rewarded. Hollings' body popped out of the opening.

Without a head.

"No!" Todt released his hold on the mutilated corpse, pushed himself to the edge of the opening. "Bastards!" He stuck his rifle into the opening and pulled the trigger. "I'll get you!" Bullets streamed into the darkness, pinging against metal, ricocheting everywhere.

The bolt of the rifle locked open, the last round fired. Todt popped the clip out, reached forward to put a new one in—and screamed as a clawed hand grabbed his arm.

He was still screaming as he disappeared into the darkness.



Colonel Sweet and his cadets slid to a stop in front of Aaron and Eater-of-Bears.

"What are you two doin' all the way out here?" the big Garou asked the white-furred Silver Fang.

"The code you gave us doesn't work." Aaron gestured toward the electronic lock. "And the door's too strong for us to break."

"Damn Caldwell!" Colonel Sweet brushed past

the two young Garou, bent over the door's tiny control panel. "This is his work," he snarled, stabbing arbitrarily at buttons. "Let's see if the emergency overrides still work." He put in one final number, pressed the *open* button.

Nothing happened.

"Well, that one was no good." He pressed *clear*, started another combination.

"You'd better hurry, sir." Brant was next to him. "We only have a little over two minutes."

"Thank you, Mr. Brant." Sweet grinned as he touched another series of buttons. "I really needed that extra bit of pressure." He punched a last number. "Now..."

The door swung open.



Shenk huddled under one of the helicopters, trying to reach someone, anyone, on his radio. "Polkow!" he screamed into the pick-up. "Waller!" No answer. "Bermen?"

Shenk wasn't well suited for this kind of duty. He'd originally joined Pentex as a bookkeeper, right out of college. He'd been good at his job, moving up the corporate ladder with the aid of a gift for dexterously juggling numbers.

One day, he'd juggled one number too many,

succumbing to the temptation to filter some of the corporation's millions into his own accounts.

It hadn't taken them long to find out. Pentex had number-shufflers much more skilled than poor Shenk—and he'd been faced with a dilemma: go to jail, or volunteer for one of Pentex's security units. Shenk had taken what he thought was the prudent course—the one that kept him out of jail.

He didn't discover how big a mistake he had made until he went through his first 'enhancement'. Oh, he *had* come out improved—able to see in the dark and detect both infrared and ultraviolet radiation—it made the night sky so much more colorful—but it also made him different. A freak with a bulging forehead and eyes the color of milk.

Shenk knew then that he'd made the wrong decision, but there was no way out. He decided to make the most of it. At least in Security Ops, he'd have a chance to move up the ladder again.

Not anymore. Shenk watched as the tall form of a Crinos Garou leaped out of the dark opening. *I should use my gun, he told himself, shoot him before he can reach me.* But even as the thought crossed his mind, Shenk realized that it would never work. *He's going to kill me.* He watched as the creature moved toward him, fangs bared, saliva dripping. *Rip out my throat and drink my blood.* Shenk put his

hands over his eyes and cried. *And I deserve it! His sobs grew louder. God help me, I deserve it!*



Jay popped out of the elevator, ready for anything. *Don't know how many more fomori are out here!* He rolled to the side, eyes searching for targets. *Have to get them fast!* He saw movement to his right, sprang that way. *Before they can get a shot off!*

He was facing a single fomor. *What the hell is the matter with him?!* The Wyrmtool was kneeling under one of the helicopters, curled into a near-fetal position.

Crying.

This is the implacable enemy? Jay shook his head as he pulled the man's gun from beside him, absently bending the barrel. *I can't kill that!* Jay hunkered down next to the sobbing figure, pulled its hands away from its eyes. "Run," he told the frightened face underneath. "Run away from here and never look back."

The fomor's white eyes stared back uncomprehendingly.

"I'm telling you to run!" Jay grabbed the man's arm, pulled him out from under the helicopter. "Now!" He yanked the fomor to his feet, shoved him away. "Quickly!"

The terrified eyes continued to hold his, then the fomor backed away. Slowly at first, then faster and faster until, almost tripping, the man turned and ran full out, racing up the path, toward the road and freedom.

"I told you to kill them." The elevator was all the way up now, exposing Dr. Caldwell and his equipment to the world.

"He was no threat."

"I decide what is or isn't a threat!" Caldwell took a step forward, the control box still in his hands. "Now get over here and start loading this equipment."

Jay sighed and moved to obey. *If I could only get that box away from him.* But even as the thought ran through his mind, he saw the mage back away from him, the control box held close to his body, one finger always on the fatal button. *No. Another sigh. There's no chance now.* He bent to pick up the first box of equipment. *Have to wait, bide my time.*



"Look!" Aaron raced forward, his eyes fixed on a shadowy object. "It's Jay's staff!"

"Careful with that." Colonel Sweet watched nervously. "That thing burned Heidel's hand to the bone."

"I know." Aaron looked down at the staff, not quite daring to touch it. "What do I do?"

"There's not much time, sir." Brant paced nervously beside the two Garou. "Less than two minutes." He looked around. "And this is the laboratory that's going to be sterilized."

"Is there any sign of Jay No-Name?" Eater-of-Bears was prowling in the corners, anxiously searching for any trace of her packmate.

"Nothing but the staff," Terry called from the other side of the big room.

"There's something up here!" Goldberg had gone ahead, looking for a way out.

"We have to go." Sweet touched the Silver Fang on the shoulder. "There's no way we can take that with us."

Aaron nodded, straightened up. "You're right." He took a step away, then grinned when he saw Brant's face. "And Mr. Brant does seem to think we should hurry."

"There's a big door back here!" Goldberg signaled from a catwalk on one end of the lab. "I think it's the way out."

"Sixty seconds." Brant was looking at the watch he'd taken from one of the dead fomori. "I hope that door isn't locked!"

Jay had finished loading the last of Dr. Caldwell's equipment into the helicopter when he heard the first siren. "That'll be the police."

The mage nodded. "I knew one of the little brats would call Daddy." He shook his head. "It wasn't worth the expense to cut out cellular phones."

"What are you going to tell them?"

Caldwell laughed. "I'm not going to tell them *anything!* By the time they arrive, we'll be airborne!"

"We?"

The mage turned toward Jay, hand still on his little box. "You didn't really think I'd leave you behind, did you?"

Jay shook his head. "I'm not going."

"Let's not waste our time arguing." Caldwell held up the controls. "I still have the box."

"It doesn't matter." Jay folded his arms across his chest. "I'm not going."

"I'll kill her!"

Jay let his teeth show. "If she dies—you die!"

"Well then..."

The ground shook, throwing both Jay and Caldwell off balance. *The sterilization timer!* Jay realized, regaining his balance just as a loud *THROOM* roared out of the elevator opening. The mage was down, his hands inches from the precious control box. *Now's my chance!*

Jay sprang, claws ready to ensure that Caldwell

never touched the box. But before he could reach the mage, a small figure rose from a depression on the side of the track and began firing—right at Jay.



Jefferson had never really felt himself to be a part of Polkow's group. Like Shenk, he'd joined Pentex as a normal worker. Unlike the bookkeeper, he'd quickly realized that there was more to the company than met the eye. He saw evidence of illegal activity everywhere he looked—and he liked what he saw.

Who gives a damn about Mother Nature, he had told himself, studying the satellite maps of the Amazon basin. *There's a profit to be made down there!*

Jefferson knew that his fortune awaited in the Amazon—but to make that fortune, he had to have money to invest. And he was flat broke.

Then he got wind of Pentex's special security teams. *Look at this pay scale!* He began to salivate as he learned more. *Not to mention the enlistment bonuses!* He joined the same day, immediately investing his bonus in stock he knew would skyrocket. *I'll be livin' on Easy Street when I finish my tour!*

Then he went in for the first operation. *Enhancement*, they called it. And realized that all the

money on Earth wouldn't do him any good. *They made me a human bloodhound!*

Jefferson's senses were extended to the limit. His nose was enlarged, his eyes replaced with new, gigantic sight organs capable of distinguishing the details of even the tiniest images. His ears were cut away, replaced by special sensors that could hear an ant walk through high grass.

They made me a freak! Even the fomor teams he worked with treated him as one, always putting him on point, the most dangerous position. *Still, I always survived.* His senses detected enemies long before anyone else knew they were there. *Even here,* he nodded to himself as he crouched in his tiny dugout. *I knew that elevator was coming up, knew that there was a Garou down there.* He smiled. *I was just too smart to try to fight it on its own terms.* He gripped his rifle. *Better to wait until it was in the open, unaware of the presence of enemies.*

Still, it was too bad about the others. *I'm going to have to call for a pick-up. I don't know how to fly the chopper.* It didn't matter. He'd be rewarded for keeping Caldwell from getting away. *Maybe they'll put me back the way I was.* He toyed with the idea for a moment, then shook his head. *No, they'd never do that. Besides...*

The Garou was starting to fight with the mage. *Think about it later. Now it's almost time to...* He

stood up, firing his rifle even before he spotted his target.

"That was close!" Goldberg stood with his back against the wall, shaken by the violence of the explosion.

"Look at this!" Eater-of-Bears crouched over a blackened mound on the side of the big room. "I think it's Kevin!"

Colonel Sweet knelt next to her. "How can you be sure?"

"Look at the face."

Sweet shrugged his shoulders. "Could be Jay."

"It's not." The lupus stood up, head questing. "The smell is wrong." She moved forward. "Jay No-Name killed him, then moved..." She paced around, headed for the middle of the room. "This way." She stopped at the base of the elevator, looked up. "He's up there."

"What is this?" Aaron fingered the metal sides of the thing.

"This place," Sweet gestured around them, "used to be an army missile site. Now it functions as a secure place for Caldwell to run his experiments."

"Where are we?" Brant looked around the big room. "We're not under the school anymore."

Sweet pointed up. "That's the athletic field—dead center of the track."

Aaron whirled to look at him. "Where the Pentex helicopters are!"

"Damn! I didn't think of that!" Sweet started to inspect the outer edges of the room. He motioned to the others. "Look around! There's an emergency exit here somewhere!" The cadets began to pace the walls. "Hurry! We've got to get out of here before Caldwell manages to get away!"

Eater looked at him. "And Jay?"

"He'll take Jay with him if he can." Sweet's face was grim. "Or kill him if he has no other choice."

Shots sounded overhead.

"Hurry!"



Jay's mind was raging as he dove under the helicopter. *Where did that guy come from?* He rolled under the supports and pulled himself up on the other side, keeping himself covered by the bulk of the machine. *Who the hell is he?* Jay peered through the open door of the Huey, careful not to expose any part of his body. There was another spray of bullets, several hitting the inside of the door next to Jay's head. *He's good!*

Jay pulled back. *What do I do?* He tried to think

of a way to reach the little fomor, but there was no cover at all, no way to cross that long open bit of ground. *He'd nail me for sure!*

There was a roar of sound. *Caldwell!* Jay turned toward the other helicopter. *He's started the engine!* He prepared to leap away from his cover, race for the other helicopter. Before he could move, the fomor's weapon sounded again, pounding bullet after bullet into Caldwell's chopper. *What's he up to?* Jay tried to take another peek, but was again pushed back by a new slew of bullets. *He's got us both pinned down!* Jay smiled to himself. *I wonder how many bullets he has left?*



This isn't going to work. Jefferson shook his head even as he put three rounds into the door of the helicopter to his right. *I can't keep both of them from moving.* Another three rounds aimed at the rotor assembly of the left-hand chopper. *I'm going to run out of ammo.* He checked the pouches at his side. *Another forty rounds.* He shook his head again. *Not enough.*

He lifted his head a little, then pushed a little soil together to steady his rifle on. *I only have one chance.* He squinted toward Caldwell's chopper, narrowing his eye to telescopic vision, inspecting

the rotor housing. *If I can hit that connecting rod, I can cripple the scientist's helicopter.* He raised his rifle, sighting in as carefully as possible. *Squeeze it gently,* he told himself. *Just the way they taught you.*

The rifle fired a split second before the ground in front of him erupted.



Goldberg found the emergency exit just as the second string of gunshots rang out above. The others clustered around the little staircase, peering up at darkness.

"The exit hatch is buried under the turf," Colonel Sweet explained. "It shouldn't be a problem."

"I'm going first." Aaron put his hand on the bottom rung of the ladder. "Until someone proves he's Wyrm-ridden, that's my comrade up there."

"You're still injured." Eater-of-Bears put her hand over his. "Let me go first."

"Neither of you is going first." Colonel Sweet pushed Aaron away. "Caldwell is my problem." He glared at the others. "Remember that."

Aaron nodded, gestured the big Garou to the ladder. "Okay." He glared at Eater. "But I'm second!"

They were still arguing when Colonel Sweet put

all his weight against the hatch, pushing it so hard that one of the hinges snapped, skewing it sideways.

Jay was looking through the doors of the Huey when the little fomor tried his last shot. *Good idea. If he can cripple Caldwell's copter, he might be able to pin us down until help arrives.* Then suddenly the hatch exploded upward. *What the hell!* Colonel Sweet's huge form followed. Jay realized that he was in close range of the fomor. *No!* Jay exploded into action, racing through the helicopter, using its height to spring forward, claws out. He was halfway to the fomor when the creature saw Colonel Sweet. Three-quarters of the way there when the rifle shifted its target, pointing toward the Colonel's giant form.

Jay's claws swept through Jefferson's head a millisecond before the little fomor could squeeze the trigger.

"Jay!" Aaron was suddenly at his side. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine." Jay flicked the remnants of the fomor off his hands, whirling as a blast of air hit him from behind. "Caldwell!"

The other chopper was in the air, skids mere feet

off the ground. Colonel Sweet raced toward it, howling a battle cry as he ran.

Jay realized he was too far away to interfere. *I gave him his chance, he thought. Now let's see if he can do anything with it!*

Sweet was twenty feet from the chopper when it started to rise. Ten feet when Caldwell pushed the yoke forward, fighting for altitude. Five feet away as it lifted higher. He leaped, his body straining to touch the door, the skids...

He missed by less than a foot.

Mother! Jay watched the chopper turn north. I won't let him get away. I'll find him. He closed his eyes. I swear it!

D

EPILOGUE

"Are you sure you won't come with us, Colonel?" Jay and his pack stood at the edge of the woods, keeping a close eye on the activity back at the school. "I'm sure the elders would welcome you back."

"I can't do it, Jay." The big man shook his head. "I still believe that their way is wrong. The Garou have to change to survive—and the old men are hidin' from change."

Jay nodded. "I understand."

"Where will you go?" Aaron's face showed his curiosity.

"For the moment," Sweet gestured behind him, "back to the school." His face turned sad. "I have to see that Heidel gets a proper burial."

Jay touched the big man on the shoulder. "I thank you for that."

"There's no need." The Colonel's hand came up in a negating gesture. "Heidel was the best Garou I ever knew." His face filled with sadness. "He was also my son."

Jay stared at the big man, suddenly seeing the resemblance. *Heidel lost a hand for honor*, Jay remembered. *And the Colonel thought it was the right thing to do*. Jay suddenly saw the man in a new light. *There's more to him than I realized*. A small smile touched his lips. *And Heidel was right about his honor*.

"Will the police give you any trouble?" Aaron was squinting back toward the quadrangle, noting the number of red lights.

"No." The Colonel's old grin was back. "After all, I *am* the commandant of the cadets."

"When are you going after Caldwell?" Jay asked, although he thought he already knew the answer.

The Colonel's grin disappeared. "As soon as I can."

Jay reached up to shake his hand. "I suspect we'll meet again, then."

"Just keep one thing in mind," Sweet cautioned him. "Caldwell is mine!"

Jay shook his head. "Not if I get to him first." He motioned to his companions. "I think it's time we were heading back."

"We never did find that Wyrn caern down south," Aaron pointed out.

"I don't think they'll be disappointed in us." Jay took a step forward, pulled out a mirror. "Grab hold." He looked into the reflector. As his gaze lost its focus, he saw, for a fleeting instant, the face of his mother. *I haven't forgotten. He set his lips grimly. I'll find you.*

Then the image was gone. Jay felt the pull of the Umbra and stepped sideways. *Whatever it takes!*

BIOGRAPHY

A lifelong fan of science fiction and fantasy, Doug Murray spent the early years of his life writing articles about horror movies for magazines like *Famous Monsters*, *Monster Times*, *Millimeter*, and *Steranko's Mediascene*.

In the mid-80s, he turned to the comics field, creating and writing the award-winning *The 'Nam*, a historically accurate story of one unit's experiences during the Vietnam War. Later he moved on to lighter fare, scripting such diverse comics as *Conan*, *Nick Fury: Agent of Shield*, *Batman: Digital Justice*, and even *Darkwing Duck* and *Roger Rabbit*.

At the same time, he was moving into the prose field, selling anthology stories to *Confederacy of the Dead*, *Tales of the White Wolf*, *Dark Destiny II*, *The Fleet* and many others.

Call to Battle is Doug Murray's second novel set in the World of Darkness; his first, *Blood Relations*, is published by HarperPrism.

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Breathe Deeply.

Somewhere west of the campsite, Peter almost tumbled down the steep bank of a small river. He grabbed at the thin branches of a low-growing tree for support and balanced precariously on the edge of a slippery six- or seven-foot drop down to water that was brown with silt. He was hot and sweaty, and his skin still prickled, as though pins had been stuck all over his body.

He had been running... he didn't know how far, or for how long. He had simply *run*. Anything to get away from Roshen and the pack. He had run until he thought he might collapse, and then kept running. Sweat was pouring off him, soaking his clothes and hair.

The stink that fading Fever left behind was very strong.

Taking a step back from the edge of the riverbank, Peter dropped his book to the ground, pulled off his hiking boots and his socks, then peeled away his shirt. The awful smell of the cologne as he pulled the sodden garment over his head was almost unbearable. He choked, hurling the shirt away. He stripped off his shorts and boxers as well, and quickly scrambled down the bank to the river. It flowed out of the clearcut around the Caern of Rain Spirits, but other than the load of silt that it carried, it did not appear polluted. The water smelled clean. Peter plunged in.

The river was fairly shallow, only just barely waist high, and the bottom was sandy. Peter had to lie down in order to submerge himself. He stayed underwater for as long as he could, letting the sun-warmed water gently wash

over and past him. When his breath began to run out, he forced himself to stay down longer, until he saw sparks of light behind his closed eyelids.

The water felt good, as it washed everything away: the fading Fever, his sweat, the heat of his exertion, his panic. He might have been happy to stay there forever.

Unfortunately, he couldn't. He had only one bottle of Fever left, and it had to last through a journey of at least five days. His panic returned. He exploded back into the world of air and reached out to grab a handle of clay mud from the river bank. Like the river water, the mud was clean. It smelled of Gaia. The Wyrms had yet to corrupt it. Peter hoped that Gaia wouldn't be offended by his use of it. He slapped it onto his skin and scrubbed desperately until his skin was tingling from the abrasion.

He already knew it was useless, though. He had tried washing before. Nothing would work. The smell always came back.

And he had only one bottle of Fever left. He grabbed more mud.

He had scrubbed his chest and arms, coating them in mud, when he heard a quiet cough from above him. He looked up. Steps-Lightly was seated on the edge of the river bank. The Silent Strider looked at him grimly. "We need to talk."

"Oh?" Peter sank down into the water, rinsing the mud away.

"Yes. About what just happened back there. About what's going on with you and your cologne. And this flower of yours." He held up Peter's book, then put it in his lap and leaned forward. "And what you know about Thunder Tiger and me."

Peter froze, then rose out of the water and reached for some more mud. He stretched his arms around to scrub at his back. What was he supposed to say to that? He had shouted at Steps-Lightly back at the campsite out

of desperate fright. There was no way the rest of the pack could have missed hearing him.

The tall Garou must have mistaken his silence for contempt. His eyes narrowed and he sat back. "All right. How long have you known? Back at Sky River when you were trying to find the latrine?"

"No." Peter shook his head and looked up reluctantly. "I really thought you were just talking."

Steps-Lightly snorted. "I can't believe that! We practically had our arms around each other!"

"What was I supposed to think? I wasn't expecting to see two Garou putting the moves on each other! Especially two male Garou!" He looked down again and was silent as he scrubbed. After a moment, he said, "I saw Thunder Tiger the night of the Ghost Raptors raid. I realized you knew he was a Ghost Raptor when you tried to keep me from hearing what Brennan was saying in the sweat lodge." He hesitated, almost looked back up at Steps-Lightly, but couldn't quite bring himself to do it. "Then I saw you when you met with him three nights ago. After it had rained. That's when I realized you were..."

"Lovers?" Steps-Lightly supplied. He shrugged. "The pack knows I'm gay."

"Do they know you're in love with another Garou?" The words slipped out before Peter could stop them. He bit his tongue and looked up at Steps-Lightly. The Silent Strider's face was blank. "I'm sorry."

"No," replied Steps-Lightly coldly. "You're not getting away that easily. You've got questions — ask them. Then I'll ask you mine." He waited.

Peter flushed and stooped over to scrub at his face. When he had rinsed the mud away, he asked without looking up, "How can you betray your pack?"

"What? Betray my pack by falling in love with a Ghost

Raptor, or betray my pack by falling in love with another Garou?"

"A Ghost Raptor."

"Tell me how I'm betraying them."

"You led the Ghost Raptors into Sky River Caern so that they could disrupt the moot," Peter said angrily. "And they followed you here so they could raid the camp while we were gone. And they're outlaws. And you're a Ghost Raptor yourself."

"First, I'm both a Ghost Raptor *and* part of the Severed Arm." Steps-Lightly tapped his chest, indicating his severed arm tattoo. "The Ghost Raptors are more than just a pack. It's like having a level of loyalty between pack and tribe. There's nothing necessarily incompatible about it. Second, the Ghost Raptors are outlaws only because Golgol Fangs-First doesn't like the fact that we won't obey him. Third, the raid on the camp..." He sighed. "All right, that was my idea. I suggested to Thunder Tiger that he might want to make things inconvenient for us."

"That sounds like a betrayal to me."

"You'll notice that my stuff was thrown around as much as anybody else's, and also that nothing was damaged except for rations, which we don't really need, and your cologne." He grimaced. "I'm sorry about that."

"What about the attack at the caern?" Peter demanded. "You told Thunder Tiger that you asked White Father to send him on the raid."

Steps-Lightly shifted uncomfortably. "I asked White Father to send him the next time the Ghost Raptors staged a raid on Sky River, just hoping that I would be there when they did. Think about it — we only found out about the moot when we got back from Manaus and you saw me with Thunder Tiger that afternoon."

"So how did they get into the center of the caern?"

"Believe it or not, Brennan actually got something

right. Remember back in the sweat lodge when he said that the Ghost Raptors have a native spirit ally that got them past the caern's defenses? We do. Her name is Panthesilea." Steps-Lightly spoke the word with a mixture of reverence and familiarity. "She's the collective spirit of the Amazonian rain forest itself. If she wants to, she really can order the caern totem spirits around. She was the one who got the Ghost Raptors into Sky River."

"Why would she want to?" Peter slicked back his hair. He was still standing in the river up to his waist. "Why are the Ghost Raptors fighting the other Garou?"

"Because Golgol's way of fighting the War is starting to damage Panthesilea's environment, Peter!" Steps-Lightly swept his arm around. "The rain forest is full of spirits. The spirit world has its own ecology — every spirit plays a role in supporting the environment of the physical world. If you start taking spirits out of their world, the physical world suffers. That's just what the Garou have started doing. In order to fight Pentex, they're capturing spirits and binding them into fetishes to make weapons. It's not quite as bad as the damage that Pentex inflicts, but it's not necessary. Panthesilea wants the Ghost Raptors to stop the Garou from making more fetishes or abusing the spirits without cause." He gestured back over his shoulder in the direction of the camp. "This was supposed to be a warning: don't abuse the caern totems. Golgol doesn't really need a lot of rain and lightning for his attack on Pentex."

"And the disruption of the moot?"

"Thunder Tiger told me that Last-One-Out was going to use some of the power generated by the moot to create a particularly strong fetish. They were there to make sure that he didn't get the chance." He sighed again. "There's a fine line between betrayal and duty to a higher cause."

"I suppose so." Peter fell silent. He knew Steps-Lightly was waiting for him to say something else, something about the Silent Strider's relationship with Thunder Tiger. He couldn't quite bring himself to ask about it, though.

Steps-Lightly didn't give him any choice. "As for loving Thunder Tiger..."

Peter splashed his hands through the water suddenly. "I don't need to hear this. I don't care."

"You do need to hear it." He met Peter's gaze. "What is it about my being gay that upsets you? That I find men attractive?" Peter didn't answer. "That you've never met a gay Garou before?"

This time Peter's gaze flickered. Steps-Lightly nodded. "Is that it?"

"No! I know gay humans." Peter retorted. "I have gay friends."

"But you never really thought that Garou could be gay, did you?" Steps-Lightly leaned back. "Nobody ever does. But we can be. Humans do it. Wolves do it. Why not Garou?"

"That doesn't bother me."

"No," agreed Steps-Lightly, "I don't suppose it does. I think most Glass Walkers tend to be pretty neutral about it, just like Silent Striders. Stargazers just nod and say 'it's the path of your life.' Silver Fangs tend to think it's all right for Garou to sleep with males as long as they do their duty to the tribe and procreate occasionally, too." He glanced down at Peter. "But what about two Garou sleeping together?"

Peter took a deep breath. That was it exactly. He looked up at Steps-Lightly. "That disturbs me," he confessed.

"Why?" Steps-Lightly sat forward sharply. "Because the ancient Litany law of the Garou says it's unnatural? Think about what's behind that part of the Litany — the mating of male and female Garou produces metis.

Sterile, deformed metis. But so what if they're not always pleasant to look at? Metis are usually a lot nicer and a lot more balanced than most Garou." He spat abruptly. "Did you know that Windrunner is a metis?"

"No," Peter said in surprise. Windrunner a metis? But she was... nice. Balanced. Not at all unnatural. "She can't be!"

"Because she's not deformed? She got off lucky — her deformity doesn't show in Homid form and it's not too obvious in Crinos. But you'll never see her in Lupus form unless she really knows you well. She doesn't care if people know she's metis, but she's still sensitive."

"What is it?" Peter asked curiously. "What's her deformity?"

"She doesn't have a tail."

Peter blinked. Steps-Lightly stabbed a finger at him. "See what you just did? You know Windrunner, but reacted to a deformity and to a stereotype that you might not have known about otherwise!" He lifted his right hand. "Why is it unnatural for Garou to mate with each other? Because it produces metis." He lifted his left hand. "Why are metis unnatural?"

"Because they're deformed?"

"Anybody can be born deformed!" Steps-Lightly said angrily. "You're colored like a coyote in Lupus form, aren't you? A lot of Garou would look down on that. Metis are considered unnatural because they're *different*." He dropped his hands. "Garou have never been good at accepting things that are different. Gay Garou are doubly different. We're attracted to our own sex — and we're the only Garou that can 'mate' with each other without producing metis. We're outside of the law. No metis, so mating isn't unnatural, right? Straight Garou aren't sure what to say about that. What does the Litany say about male Garou mating with male Garou, or females with females?"

"Nothing," responded Peter quietly.

"Exactly." Steps-Lightly let Peter think for a moment, then added, "So tell me what the deal is with your cologne."

Peter clenched his teeth. The Silent Strider had trusted him enough to tell him the truth about the Ghost Raptors. He had trusted him enough to speak frankly about his love for Thunder Tiger. Now he expected the same trust in return. It would be good to tell somebody about the Fever. And if he ever needed an ally, it was now. "I..."

But what were running with the Ghost Raptors and loving another Garou beside his own secret? The Ghost Raptors served the Amazon itself — as Steps-Lightly had said, it was a duty to a higher cause. Steps-Lightly's love for Thunder Tiger was also a higher cause, unnatural in the eyes of many Garou, but still worth fighting for. The secret behind Fever was far darker and much more dangerous. His heart almost stopped and his stomach knotted. "I..." He spun around, staring across the river. "I'm sorry. I can't."

Peter could imagine the scowl that must be on Steps-Lightly's face. "Then what about the flower in your book?"

"No." Peter's voice broke uncontrollably. He could feel tears at the corners of his eyes, and he bent his head to wipe at them.

"No one can keep a secret forever." Steps-Lightly paused. "The Fever and the flower are connected. Something is *really* wrong, isn't it?"

Peter nodded without turning around. He raised his head again. Just in time to see a single clump of small trees on the far bank of the river shake.

The air, still heavy with impending rain, was absolutely calm.

They had seen no animals in the area of the clearcut

large enough to make trees shake. They had seen no living animals at all.

The Ghost Raptors might still be around. But why would they be spying on Steps-Lightly, one of their own?

Peter caught a glimpse of something big and *orange* through the leaves. Whatever else they might be, the Ghost Raptors were not orange.

"Fomor!" he screamed, lunging for the river bank. The steep bank was slippery with mud. Peter couldn't get a grip on it — and the more he tried, the more muddy and slippery his own hands and skin became. Steps-Lightly was on his feet instantly, then dropping to lie flat on the ground. There was a sharp crack from behind Peter and something hit the river bank beside his hand with a dull splat that sent up a little spray of mud. A bullet. More cracks, gunshots, rang out. Peter heard a nasty, deep, rolling laugh. More than one fomor. Maybe an entire Pentex First Team. And Peter was a fish in a barrel, completely exposed. His naked back was suddenly cold. Pentex's soldiers could pick him off anytime. They were toying with him. "Steps-Lightly!" he yelled desperately. "Help!"

A long, hairy arm appeared as Steps-Lightly reached down from the top of the riverbank. The Silent Strider had taken Crinos form. "Grab hold!" he growled. Peter snatched at his clawed hand. For a moment, his mud-slick palms just slid against fur, but then Steps-Lightly closed his fist and hauled him up.

"Just shoot them!" screeched a voice from the far bank. Peter looked over his shoulder in mid-air, trying to see what they were up against. He got a vague impression of fatigue-clad humans and misshapen fomori, their guns gleaming in their hands. The speaker was an unnaturally tall, skeletally thin man. He looked as though he were walking on stilts. Peter only got a

brief look at him, though, because he suddenly raised a rifle and took aim at the Garou across the river. Peter twisted around, trying to get his feet on the bank, but the fomor's gunshot rang out too quickly. Steps-Lightly howled in sudden pain as a streak of blood appeared along his forearm. His grip failed. Peter dropped. The fomor with the deep laugh guffawed again.

Peter just managed to catch the edge of the bank. His feet scrambling against the mud, he clawed desperately at the ground above. One hand came down on top of something soft, something loose. Peter yelped as he lost his purchase and slid backwards again. The thing in his hand slid down the muddy bank into the water.

Steps-Lightly snatched at Peter's wrist with the hand of his uninjured arm, dragging him up to safety just as a storm of gunfire broke against the river bank. The stilt fomor screamed in anger.

Peter rolled away from the bank, seizing his clothes and boots, and snatching his book from where Steps-Lightly had dropped it. He looked over at the Silent Strider. "Are you all right?"

"No!" Steps-Lightly snarled. His upper right arm was bleeding profusely, though it looked as though the fomor's bullet had only grazed him. The wound, however, showed no signs of healing. "Silver!"

"Shit!" The First Team was using silver bullets. There were splashes as the fomori and the humans waded into the river in pursuit of them. Gunfire sprayed into the trees overhead. There was no way the two Garou would be able to fight Pentex's monsters. They would have to run and hope they could lose the First Team in the jungle. Peter jerked on his boxers. His shirt, flung aside in disgust earlier, was lying off in the bushes somewhere, too far away to worry about right now. He grabbed for his shorts.

But his hand found only dirt. There was no sign of

them. He looked around wildly. Where were they? Where was the bottle of Fever? "My shorts!" he snapped at Steps-Lightly. The Silent Strider growled, eager to be away, but pointed toward the river bank.

Peter scrambled over, his belly to the ground. His heart was thundering in his chest. "They're not here!" he hissed back to Steps-Lightly. "Where did..."

The soft, loose thing that his hand had found, that had almost sent him plunging back into the river. The thing that had instead fallen into the water itself. The fomori and their silver bullets momentarily forgotten, Peter stuck his head over the bank of the river. He saw his shorts... half submerged in the water, buoyed up only by trapped air. Then even that support bubbled away and the shorts sank. Pulled down by the weight of the bottle of Fever in their pocket.

"No..." Peter whispered, stunned.

The stilt fomor screeched again, and the humans of the First Team dropped to their knees in the water of the river, bringing up their guns. Peter felt Steps-Lightly seize hold of his ankles and wrench him back from the edge of the bank. "Move!" the tall Garou roared. He hurled Peter's boots into his chest. "Move!" Out in the river, the tall fomor screamed and ordered its troops forward again.

Peter just grasped the boots. He had no Fever at all now.

Steps-Lightly howled in his ear. "Fomori! Remember?" He reached for Peter's shoulders, ready to shake him out of his daze if necessary.

No Fever. "No!" Peter snapped his arms up, pushing Steps-Lightly away with the boots in his hand.

"Then come!" Steps-Lightly shifted forms, shrinking into Lupus shape.

Peter, however, jammed his feet into his boots and exploded into Crinos form, his boots and boxers

becoming part of his body. Steps-Lightly whined at him, already poised to flee. Wolves could run faster than the huge, bestial Crinos. But Peter shook his head and grabbed his book. It was too large to carry in his mouth while he was running. He would need the Crinos' hands to hold it. Even if all of his Fever was gone, he couldn't lose the flower inside the book!

They ran. Somewhere behind them, a fomor shouted, and, seconds later, a gunshot blasted through the trees. The First Team was over the river bank. The cover provided by the rain forest undergrowth was heavy, but not heavy enough to hide a Garou fleeing in Crinos form. Peter crashed through the bushes and ferns like a steamroller. Steps-Lightly was virtually silent by comparison, even though he ran awkwardly, favoring his wounded leg. A bullet cracked into a tree trunk very close to Peter's head. The terrified beast within him urged Peter to drop his book and run as a wolf, but Peter fought back his fear. He needed the flower.

The hail of bullets increased as more First Team soldiers joined the first, then suddenly became much more sporadic. Peter risked a glimpse backward.

The fomori and humans were pursuing them again, the humans firing only when they had an opportunity to do so without hitting their inhuman teammates. The stilt fomor was gliding between the trees on all fours like a spindly ghost, its elongated arms serving as a second set of legs, its gun strapped across its back like a narrow, lethal saddle. Three smaller fomori were racing forward as well, moving as quickly as wolves. They were short and slight, but their bodies were covered in sharp, thorn-like barbs. Another fomor, more slow, ran with the humans. It was the one with the deep, nasty laugh. Its skin was a bright and lumpy orange, and its mouth stretched in an unnaturally wide grin as it guffawed. Five fomori. Maybe as many humans with guns.

They were outnumbered. These might be the fomor and humans that the Garou had scented yesterday, returning from the west. If so, they were lucky that there were fewer of them. Peter burst into a sprint, legs pumping as fast they could, arms sweeping heavy bushes aside. Steps-Lightly, although wounded, had already vanished ahead of him into the undergrowth. Garou could run for miles. Peter just had to hope that the First Team's stamina was lower.

There was a hiss, like a snake, behind him, and something leaped onto his back. Peter howled as a thousand needles dug into his skin. One of the barbed fomor! Peter tried to wrench and slash at it as he ran, but the thing was fighting him as well, clawing at his eyes. It was all he could do to keep its hands away from his face. The fomor screamed and hissed again in glee. Peter's stomach went cold. The other two like it could only be steps away from tackling him as well.

Abruptly, though, hairy bodies were flashing through the bushes beside him, matching his pace before erupting into Crinos form and leaping into his wake to face the pursuing fomor. The rest of the Severed Arm.

The fomor on his back squealed and lashed out at a new target. "Don't stop!" yowled Windrunner. Peter glimpsed her arm slashing out at the fomor, talons flashing, then the creature's weight was gone from his back. New pain blossomed where its barbs had dug into him. Peter yelped but didn't stop running.

From behind him, there were thuds and howls as Brennan and Roshen dispatched or disabled the other barbed fomori. The rest of the First Team shouted as they saw the new Garou. Renewed gunfire broke out. Brennan, in Lupus form, came surging past Peter like a black wave. Windrunner dropped into her wolf shape as well.

In spite of the danger of the First Team behind him,

Peter couldn't help glancing at her haunches as she ran on ahead. Steps-Lightly had been right. The Uktena had no tail.

Roshen was beside him suddenly, a white-furred monster running through the shadows, his arm-club held tightly. There was yellowish goo dripping from the fetish weapon, and some of the fomori's barbs clung to it. "Too many to fight!" he panted. "Too hard to lose! Head to clearcut! Run for caern!"

Roshen had had the same idea as Peter — outrun their foul pursuers. Once into the clearcut, the Garou would be able to race to the distant safety of the Caern of Rain Spirits, leaving the First Team gasping behind them.

The Garou would have the advantage of their lithe Lupus or powerful Crinos forms to get them through the heavy undergrowth. The fomor and humans would have a harder time of it.

And then there was a deafening crack of thunder from overhead. In its wake, Peter recognized the pattering hiss of heavy rain falling on the jungle canopy. He smiled to himself. Gaia was on their side. Surely the humans and fomori would break off the pursuit in favor of seeking shelter.

But they didn't. When Peter and Roshen hit the green tangle of the new growth at the edge of the rain forest, the First Team was still on their heels. Two of the little barbed fomori were after them again as well. And Peter realized something else: two huge Crinos smashing their way through undergrowth left a broken, open trail behind them. The fomori and humans weren't stupid. They used the path that Peter and Roshen were making. The Garou wouldn't have any advantage over the First Team here. He howled in frustration as he slashed at the wet plants with his free hand. And they had no choice! It was either tear their way forward to safety or stop and

face certain death — neither he with his precious burden nor Roshen with his missing arm could get far as wolves.

The First Team still had to move slowly, however. The trail that Roshen and he were leaving was narrow and treacherous. The fomori would have learned from the pack's sudden appearance before and they would be on guard against further attacks from Garou lurking in the brush. Occasionally the humans let loose a random volley of bullets, but Roshen made sure that he and Peter stayed low and changed their direction frequently.

Peter's heart was pounding again. His Rage wanted to lash out at Pentex's soldiers. He was tired of running. Rainwater mixed with sweat dripped from his fur and into his eyes, stinging them. The wounds inflicted by the barbed fomor, slowly healing, were painful as well. But Peter held back his Rage. Even with all of his anger rushing through him, this would not be a fight he could win. He forced himself to keep running.

A howl echoed out of the distance.

It was not a howl Peter recognized. For a moment, he dared to hope that the Garou of the Caern of Rain Spirits had somehow learned of the Severed Arm's danger and were coming to their aid. But only for a moment.

The howl was strange. Eerie. And other howls joined it in a dissonant chorus. It was a sharp and grating sound, like fingernails scratching against a blackboard. Peter came to a sudden halt, and Roshen sucked in his breath. Pentex's First Team cheered.

Black Spiral Dancers.